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ISSUE 69 JULY 2007
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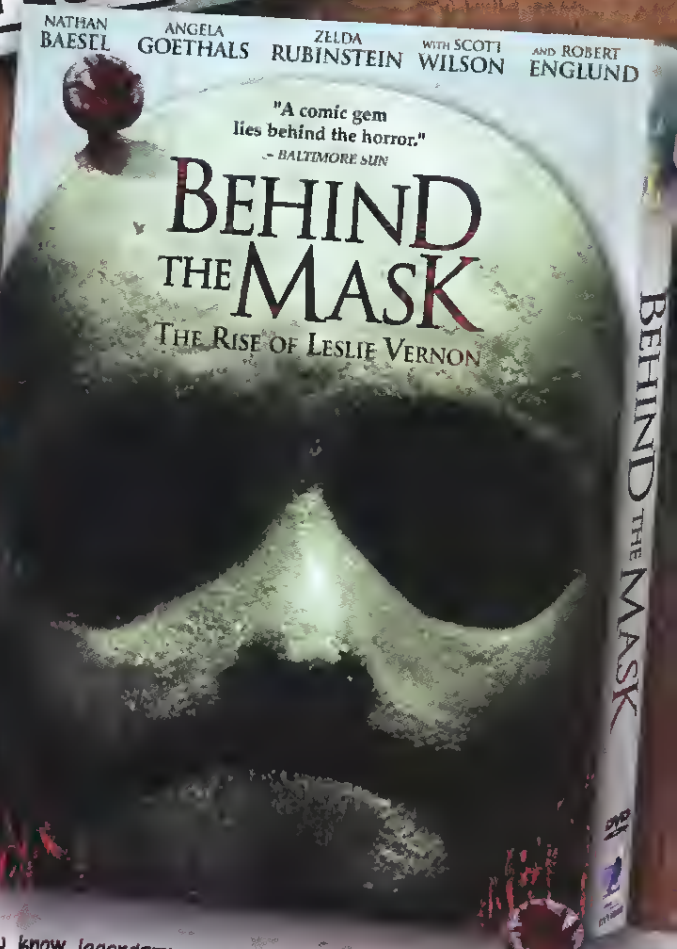
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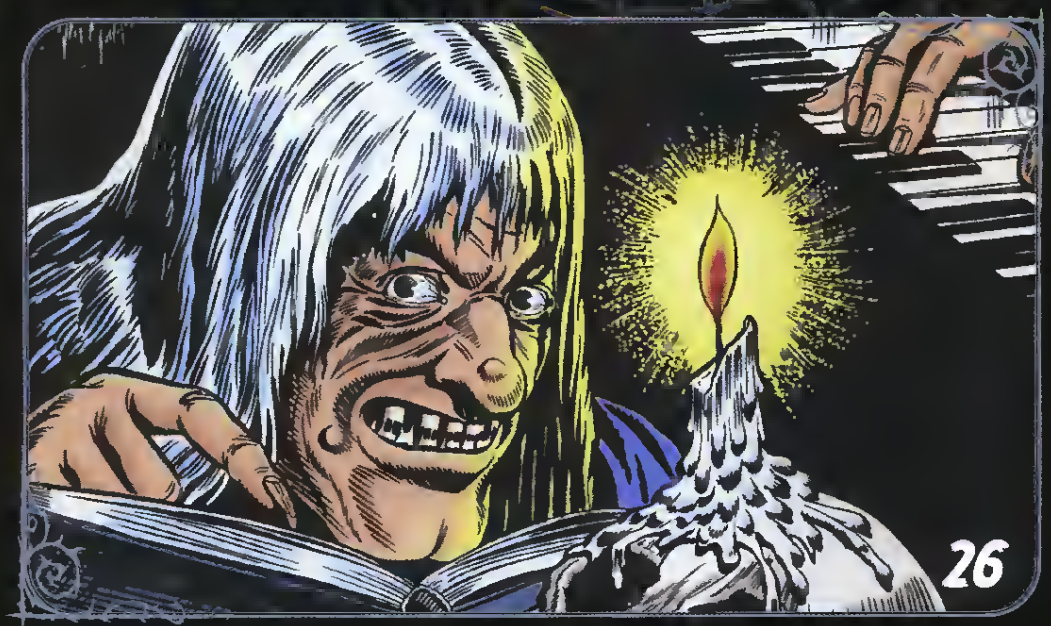
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Horror in Culture & Entertainment

RUE MORGUE

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The Monster Squad, a Bad News Bears-meets-the-Universal monsters kid comedy, has gathered an impressive cult following since its release twenty years ago. This month, the lost gem finally makes its way to DVD. Rue Morgue reunites Fred Dekker, the entire cast of monsters, creature designer Stan Winston and star Andre Gower.
by **Chris Alexander, Dave Alexander** and **Jovanka Vuckovic**

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Note From Underground

Originally, I planned to write an editorial that was light in tone for this issue, as our cover story's essentially a kids movie, but in the twilight hours of production I received a Post Mortem letter that changed my mind. We get a lot of letters at *Rue Morgue*, some laudatory, some critical, some introspective. But once in a great while I get a letter that just stops me in my tracks. This one was in response to my recent editorial on love and pain being related experiences (*RM#67*). The reader said she felt relieved after reading it because it suddenly made sense of something she's always experienced anguish over.

See, she's a rape victim, many times over, and says she repeatedly relives her experiences every time she watches rape scenes in movies. That's pretty normal for women who have been raped. But then she goes on to say that she somehow feels good about it. "I've always thought that something was wrong with me. How can a woman who has been repeatedly victimized by rape find so much satisfaction from watching a movie that depicts it?" This is a dark, loaded question with some very complex psychology behind it. But I admire this woman's honesty, so I'd like to attempt to answer her here.

Obviously, rape is one of the ugliest, most devastating horrors a person can experience. Statistics reveal that one in four women have either been molested or raped at some time in their lives. Because it happens far, far less to men, it's hard for most of them to fully understand it. That's likely the reason why there are far fewer male rape scenes in the movies – after all, they are predominantly made by males (*Deliverance*, *Singapore Sling*, *Calvaire*, *American History* X and *Baise-moi* are among the films that have the nastiest portrayals of males as sexual victims). When it comes to rape scenes, I think male viewers tend to identify more with the aggressor or with the entire scenario (that doesn't mean they condone it, it just means they don't find themselves in the position of the female too often) and women naturally tend to identify with the victim, not surprising given those terrible statistics.

Because rape scenes are most often depicted from a male viewpoint (frequently referred to as "the male gaze"), I find they're often mishandled or not addressed in a meaningful way. The act is typically used as a set piece, so much so that there's even a subgenre for it: rape/revenge. One of the most notorious of the lot is *I Spit on Your Grave*, but even its ridiculously exxxagerated rape scene is somehow missing something crucial. It's an exploitation film, so the acts of rape in it are almost forgivable because they're not very realistic. Victim Jennifer Hills (Camille Keaton) gets revenge on all five of the men who gang-raped her. And the way she goes about it, rather than justify what went before it, merely continues the exploitation, which kind of renders the entire mess limp, so to speak. In other words, it's a contrivance, a construction, designed to entertain – so over the top that it's almost impossible to take seriously.

Which brings me to the reader's question. I find it interesting that she derives something positive from watching *I Spit on Your Grave* – a mean-spirited, nasty movie that completely objectifies and debases women, reduces them to mere sexual objects and does so with the intention to titillate, not disturb. I don't meet too many women who are particularly fond of that film; it's impressive she's able reconcile deep emotional trauma by watching it repeatedly.

I've said this many times: though they are no substitute for therapy, horror movies are cathartic. They can help exorcise demons that might otherwise remain hidden, gnawing away at our well being. Perhaps, letter writer, by raping yourself with rape scenes, you're actually doing yourself some good. That satisfaction you're feeling could be a result of having a better understanding of the experience. If you're slowly chipping away at the pain by allowing yourself to be with it (an actual technique used in cognitive therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder), you're loosening it, little by little, which isn't a bad thing.

JV

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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

RM#68 was an excellent issue. Everything from the editorial to the feature on *Fido* had the kind of depth that is consistent with any other issue, if not actually higher. The biggest surprise of the issue was the feature on T.S. Kuebler. Holy fucking shit, those are some ridiculously amazing sculptures. They actually disturbed me, weirdly enough. The pieces on *Grindhouse* were both incredibly entertaining. Still, my opinion hasn't changed and I'm convinced that *Grindhouse* is still the most ass-kicking movie of the year.

The Assistant Warden – The Rue Mortuary

THANK YOU for the short (but oh so sweet) article you did on Tom Kuebler in *RM#68*. I have been a fan of Kuebler's work for a few years now and have yet to read an article on him. I especially loved the photography and layout of the article, I'm sure even he would say you really captured the essence of his work. Bravo!

"Monster" Matt Eames – Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

RM#67 is the latest in an endless stream of superb issues, each seemingly better than its predecessor and answers the question that's been haunting me for the past 30 days: how are you going to top the *Grindhouse* issue? The answer: powerhouse Jodorowsky unbound, After Dark and Toe Tag! It'll take some high magnitude cool to top this.

Steve Perram – Bellingham, Washington

RM#67 was a terrific issue, with the homages paid to directors Mario Bava and Bob Clark alone making the magazine worth its cover price. You seem to have lucked out as well with some quality books to review (slim pickings most of the time, I've noticed). Also, thank you also for your coverage of the After Dark series. I thought *The Gravedancers* was a fun movie, but I've been skittish about watching the others. Thanks to you, I know which ones to get, and which ones to leave on the shelf.

Corey Armstrong – Lebanon, New Hampshire

AFTER READING last month's review of *Grindhouse*, I am sure I am not alone when I say the reason it flopped was the studio's decision to open it on Easter weekend. This isn't the only case of a good horror film flopping due to a decision to open the film on a crowded weekend: Lionsgate opened *High Tension* and *The Devil's Rejects* on crowded summer weekends to poor box office. History is repeating itself on June 8 when *Hostel 2* opens and on June 22 when *1408* opens. If they would realize that late spring through summer is the time that families spend with their children and that they are more likely to see *Shrek 3* than *Hostel 2* then maybe they would pick better times to open their films so that they would have more to return to their investors than just an apology.

Adam P. Koetters – Quincy, Illinois.

I FELT COMPELLED to email and say how much I appreciate a little gesture you have made. I have been a long-time subscriber to *Rue Morgue*, the only magazine in my life I have read for so long, and read every issue cover to cover. So when I just recently re-subscribed and got a letter from you, signed by you, thanking me for my support and offering me the chance to email you if I ever had any questions or concerns, I was very impressed. These are the types of things that nobody does anymore, show appreciation. There are a million offers out in the world for people to become a customer of any given business, but not much in the way of appreciating people who already support a business. I just wanted to not only say keep up the stellar work on the magazine, but also keep up the attitude and professionalism and sheer genuine passion for your work. It shows through in every issue, and in meeting any of you in person, and it showed through in that little one-page letter you sent to me.

Bill Howard – address withheld

IT SICKENS ME that there are so many crap movies being made these days. I'll start off with Eli Roth, I thought *Cabin Fever* was a poor man's *Outbreak* with more T&A and even worse acting. Then I saw *Hostel*, waiting to see a really brutal film, and all I got for my money was a cheap frat boy nightmare romp. So now here we are again with Tarantino suffering from that horrible movie *Grindhouse*, which was a slap in my face, producing *Hostel 2*, an all-chick flick about – you guessed it – horny college girls getting date-raped by rich folks. I don't get it. Then Rob Zombie is remaking *Halloween*. This remake of a remake and prequel shit is tired, besides wasn't Zombie's *House of 1000 Corpses* the bastard kid of way better Tobe Hooper films, anyway? I have seen the trailer for *Halloween* and the new mask looks like a poor man's Leatherface. Enough is enough. Put the camera down and write better shit.

Mike Lopez – Hollywood, California

I WANTED to write because I have not seen in your magazine an account of horror themes in music videos. Forgive me if I have missed this feature. If you should feature horror-themed music videos in your mag, you should write about Greg Kihn's "Jeopardy" and Dio's "Last in Line" – two of the most freaky videos I have seen!

Carlos Barera – Escondido, California

We encourage readers to send their comments via mail or e-mail. Letters may be edited for length and/or content. Please send to info@rue-morgue.com or:

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Dreadlines

News Highlights Horror Happenings

FanTasia highlights include Jean Rollin and apocalypse films

Last summer, over 75,000 movie maniacs attended the tenth edition of FanTasia, North America's biggest genre film fest. It's a figure which both impresses and pleases Mitch Davis, the Montreal festival's Director of International Programming.

"I'm still scarred by a childhood where almost none of my friends were interested in watching the kind of films that I loved," Davis tells *Rue Morgue*. "And it's so damn amazing to see so many people storming the cinema and cheering for obscure and brilliant foreign genre films."

Look for equally enthusiastic crowds this month. Year eleven of FanTasia (July 5 – 23) will screen over 100 films and 120 shorts in three theatres. Expect a wild mix of horror, sci-fi and fantasy from around the world, including spotlights on New Zealand and Russia, an expanded roster of edgy documentaries, a series of urban apocalypse movies and the latest from acclaimed genre directors such as *Tetsuo*'s Shinya Tsukamoto (*Nightmare Detective*), *Suicide Club*'s Sion Sono (*Exte*) and *August Underground*'s Fred Vogel (*The Redsin Tower*). French legend Jean Rollin (*The Living Dead Girl*, *The Grapes of Death*) will also debut his just-completed new film *La Nuit Des Horloges* (Night of the Clocks) and receive a lifetime achievement award.

"Jean Rollin was a genuine trailblazer of '70s erotic Eurohorror," Davis says. "He made deeply personal art-horror works that to this day stand alone in the genre, dripping with supernatural surrealism and eccentric poetry." FanTasia will also be screening Rollin's personal 35mm print of 1970's *Frisson Des Vampires* (*Shiver of the Vampires*) along with *Horloges*, which Davis describes as "a very sad film because it's Rollin's bittersweet goodbye to this world. It almost feels like he's made his own cinematic eulogy."



Mulberry Street: *A New York-set urban apocalypse film in FanTasia's Hell is a City spotlight*

Other big guests this year include much-lamented director Uwe Boll (screening his latest video game adaptation *Postal*), *Wendigo* writer/director Larry Fessenden (showing *The Last Winter*, starring Ron Perlman) and Shusuke Kaneko (following up last year's entry *God's Left Hand, Devil's Right Hand* with the manga-inspired *Death Note* films).

New York-based newcomer Jim Mickle will show his full-length feature debut *Mulberry Street*, which Davis describes as "'80s-era Abel Ferrera doing *Demons* in a New York tenement building."

Mulberry Street, about six evicted New Yorkers who band together when a mysterious infection starts turning Manhattanites into bloodthirsty rat creatures, is part of Hell is a City, FanTasia's new urban apocalypse spotlight. Other films in the program include the Montreal-shot *End of the Line*, the Sundance hit *The Signal*, the LA dirty bomb saga *Right at Your Door* and the sci-fi comedy *The World Sinks Except Japan*.

"I think [Hell is a City] represents a sort of boiling point that a lot of filmmakers are feeling as the world becomes an increasingly paranoid place with the threat of sudden



catastrophe and the distrust of those around you becoming instilled in our way of experiencing daily life," Davis explains. "Two of the films in the series, *Mulberry Street* and *Right at Your Door*, very openly address the post-9/11 social climate – the fear and confusion, but more importantly the sadness, frustrations and the sense of total abandonment when it comes to those who are supposed to be leaders and helpers."

The horrors and absurdities of real life are also captured in this year's expanded documentary program. Among the titles: *Your Mommy Kills Animals* (about animal rights), *Zoo* (about a group of men who have sex with horses), J.T. Petty's mock horror doc *S&Man*, *Loco Fighters* (about Mexican wrestling), *Beijing Bubbles* (about China's punk rock scene) and *Bianca Beauchamp: All Access* (about Montreal's fetish queen).

"Over the years whenever I programmed a doc like *Popaganda*, *The Backyard* or Richard Stanley's films, they always packed [the theatre] and audiences really loved them," Davis explains. "I see so many great docs each year and I always held myself back to doing just one or two in a year, but since we have more screening slots now, what the hell!"

Last year's spotlight on contemporary Russian genre movies is complemented by a series of rare and restored Soviet fantasy films. Curated by Alla Verlotsky of New York's Seagull Films, From The Tzars To The Stars will include 1936's *Cosmic Voyage*, a "stunning" silent film with futuristic art direction and set design that, Davis claims, includes some of "the strongest moments that international sci-fi had ever seen up until that time. Had it not been made behind the Iron Curtain, it would have been in every film reference book in the Western world the way *A Trip to the Moon* or *Metropolis* are." FanTasia will show half of the 16-film program this year, the other half in 2008. Also screening will be a 35mm print of *Solaris* director Andrei Tarkovsky's philosophical sci-fi classic *Stalker* (1979).

Kiwi filmmakers not named Peter Jackson get a chance as FanTasia spotlights New Zealand. Leading the herd is Jonathan King's mutated killer sheep saga *Black Sheep* (*RM#68*). *Perfect Creature* stars Dougray Scott (*Dark Water*) and Saffron Burrows in a genetic mutation spin on the vampire mythos. *The Devil Dared Me To* is a bloody "stunts gone wrong" comedy, while *Lord of the Rings*' Jonathan Rhys-Davies finds work in *The Ferryman*.

As Asia continues to crank out fright flicks of varying quality, J-horror is supplemented this year by generous helpings of K-horror and T-horror. Korea delves into *Deliverance*-style backwoods thrills with *A Bloody Aria*, which Davis calls "a masterpiece." Thai highlights are *Alone* (from the directors of *Shutter*) and *13* ("think *Fear Factor* on a busy street with humiliation, mutilation and murder thrown in"). Japan's contributions include *Pulse* director Kiyoshi Kurosawa's latest, *Retribution*, as well as the first studio-backed offerings by avant garde filmmakers Shinya Tsukamoto and Sion Sono.

"Tsukamoto's *Nightmare Detective* is his first wide-release studio film but it's incredibly death-obsessed and still has all of Tsukamoto's pet themes and his hammering use of film language and sound," says Davis. Sono's *Exte*, meanwhile, casts *Kill Bill*'s Chiaki Kuriyama in a studio film that still features some of the "most outlandishly surreal images of body horror we've seen since *Uzumaki*."

Davis promises the festival's short film portion, Small Gauge Trauma, is really going to mess people up. The two-hour program starts "kind of light" before building "to a pitch-black crescendo" with *Gary's Touch* ("like Harmony Korine fused with Buddy Giovinazzo and Jörg Buttgereit") and *The Demonology of Desire* ("extraordinary in its bravery and originality"), *Rue Morgue* president Rodrigo Gudiño's follow-up to his well-received debut short *The Eyes of Edward James*.

And if all of that isn't enough to tempt you to Montreal, Davis offers another rationale: "Our transit system rules and Montrealers look good in July."

For more information and the complete film schedule, visit fantasiafest.com

Sean Plummer



Hatchet: *Adam Green's ultra gory love letter to '80s slasher films.*



Dreadlines

ROADKILL

FROM THE INFO HIGHWAY

plaguezone.net
David Wellington may be the king of the modern serial novel, having penned five such books (including *Monster Island* and *13 Bullets*) for online consumption, with each title subsequently scoring a book deal. *Plague Zone*, Wellington's sixth tale, concerns a man who ventures into Seattle, now quarantined and zombie-filled, on a mission of bloody revenge.

shocktillyoudrop.com
Horror journalist Ryan Rotten comes into his own with the launch of his Shock Till You Drop genre news site. Visitors can read feature stories and reviews, delve into one of the many daily news updates, watch movie trailers or chat with like-minded horror fiends in the site's forums. Drop by for the scoop on upcoming scares.

johnnyhollow.com
Designed by dark artist Vincent Marcone and the talented fiends at mypetskeleton.com, Johnny Hollow's new home is truly a thing of dark ethereal beauty. Watch promo vids, check tour dates and play the mysterious Scuttle Buggery Flash game to unlock hidden tracks from their upcoming record.

findagrave.com
Cemetery tourists and headstone photographers should bookmark this site immediately, as it's home to a vast database of burial sites, famous and otherwise. Find a Grave allows users to search through its records in several different ways, including by name, date, locale and cemetery. Go digging.

youaredamned.com
Thought issuing damnations was the work of the lord? Well, there's a new boss in town: you! At this handy URL you can damn friends, enemies, former lovers and anyone else who crosses your path. Just enter their name and crime, then watch as they're added to the online wall of shame.



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Compiled by Monica S. Kuebler
Got a Roadkill suggestion?
E-mail a link to. roadkill@rue-morgue.com

Undead creators trade zombies for vampires in second feature



The Spierig brothers on the set of ***Undead****.*

After giving the zombie film an otherworldly reworking with 2003's *Undead* (*RM#36*), the Spierig Brothers are turning the vampire movie on its cold, pale ear with their new feature, *Daybreakers*. Shooting in Australia – where the siblings hail from – but set in the US, it's a revisionist take on the bloodsucker tale.

"It twists the rules of the subgenre without discarding or disrespecting what we love about it," says Peter Spierig, who co-wrote *Daybreakers* and is co-directing it with his brother Michael. "Vampires are at the top of the food chain. Rather than hiding out in caves, castles or traditional underground dwellings, they have chosen to accept their place in life (or death) and returned to the suburbs. They have continued on with their day-to-day, or now night-to-night, existence, only with slight vampire modifications. Underground walkways, cars adapted with daytime video-driving displays and windowless houses have become standard. These 'people' are just like us, living within the conventions of this new society. Only now there is a serious problem, they're running out of food: human blood!"

The movie stars Ethan Hawke (*Gattaca*, *Assault on Precinct 13*) and Sam Neill (*In the Mouth of Madness*, *Event Horizon*) and will be distributed some time next year by Lionsgate, which picked up *Undead* for distribution after its Canadian debut at the 2003 Toronto International Film Festival. The low-budget feature (made for well under a million dollars) earned a reputation for its ambitious gore. Steve Boyle, who headed up the practical special effects on *Undead*, returns for *Daybreakers*. He promises that the look of the film will be as original as its approach to the genre.

"In the past, vampires have had the sexy look and then have their monster design look," Boyle explains. "We feel we're doing something different with our design. We approached it as: a vampire looks human because it feeds off humans, but what if out of desperation vampires started feeding off each other? … I think vampires need to be put in another context all together and I'm confident we are doing that with *Daybreakers*."

Boyle will be working as part of Weta Workshop, known for its special effects on *Black Sheep*, *The Host* and Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Spierig points out that having a budget large enough to hire Weta is just one of the luxuries the brothers will enjoy with their second feature.

"When you are the writer, director, producer, editor, visual effects supervisor, sound designer and occasional caterer, it became very hard to focus on one job," he says. "With *Daybreakers* we have a lot less jobs to do, that's not to say it's going to be easy at all, it just means our energies can be focused in one area at a time."

Although the much larger-budgeted *Daybreakers* is more mainstream than the D.I.Y. *Undead*, Boyle promises that the horror will be hardcore. "I wouldn't worry about the red stuff, we're not holding back on anything. The killings are fast, bloody and extremely violent."

Spierig confirms, "Yes, lots of blood. Lots and lots of blood."

JD Alic



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THE CORONER'S REPORT 13

Weird Stats
Morbid Facts

✚ Texas State University's plan to build America's largest "body farm" – an area where scientists bury corpses in order to study human decomposition – was recently suspended after fears surfaced that buzzards circling the area might become a threat to aircraft.

✚ When *The Bad Seed* was released theatrically in the US in 1956, officials banned all children from movie houses where the film was screening, apparently believing that it might inspire copycat violence.

✚ Until 1820, vandalism of Westminster Bridge in London was punishable by death.

✚ John Carpenter began making genre films (with titles such as *Terror from Space* and *Revenge of the Colossal Beasts*) with a hand-held 8mm camera at age eight.

✚ This past May, a seventeen-year-old boy walked into a Japanese police station holding his mother's severed head. He confessed to her murder, then led authorities to the rest of her body.

✚ William Peter Blatty, author of *The Exorcist*, once considered becoming a priest.

✚ In 16th-century Italy, artists would often assist doctors with the dissection of corpses so they could more accurately portray the nude human form in their works.

✚ Wes Craven rejected *Scream* twice before finally agreeing to direct it.

✚ Police in Tacoma, Washington recently found themselves baffled after someone dressed a dead fawn in baby's clothes and left it at the doorstep of a local theatre.

✚ William Seabrook's 1929 travel book *The Magic Island*, about Haiti, marked the first appearance of the zombie in American and European literature.

✚ Between 1882 and 1944 there were 4708 recorded lynchings in America.

✚ *The Dark Eyes of London* (1940) starring Bela Lugosi was the first British horror film to be given an "H" rating. "H" stood for "Horrific" and meant that no one under sixteen would be permitted into the theatre.

✚ In Afghanistan, it is illegal to dissect a corpse, even for medical or research purposes. As a result, some medical students in that country have taken to grave-robbing in order to study human anatomy.

Compiled by **Monica S. Kuebler**
Got a weird stat or morbid fact?
Send it through to info@rue-morgue.com

The Rue Morgue SICK TOP SIX

Instances of MAGGOT MAYHEM



1. *City of the Living Dead*
Fulci's wiggly weather.

2. *The Fly*
Brundle's bouncing baby abomination.

3. *August Underground's Mordum*
Post-mortem infant fly farm

4. *Suspiria*
Argento's ludicrous larval downpour

5. *Galaxy of Terror*
Oversized outfit sucking space worm

6. *The Lost Boys*
"Maggots, Michael. You're eating maggots."



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KIDS VS. MONSTERS!

by CHRIS ALEXANDER

Though they became popular in the early 1940s, the classic movie monsters never really found their official cult – that fervent following that would cement their enduring legacy – until the late 1950s and early 1960s. As television became more popular, networks scrambled for programming to fill the late-night gaps between the news and the national anthems. Film studios sold off blocks of A and B-list films from their back catalogue relatively cheaply, including most of the Universal Pictures horror library. Celebrated terrors including Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931), James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), George Waggner's *The Wolf Man* (1941), plus myriad franchise offshoots and bizarre mash-ups such as *Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman* (1943) and *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948) made their way to the small screen. A legion of North American children – arguably TV's biggest market – took notice in a big way, shivering along to the black and white Gothic shockers and developing, what was for many, a lifelong pop culture obsession.

And so, while a nation's youth buckled under the steady stream of '60s monster revival mania, one of those infatuated tots, San Francisco's Fred Dekker, would eventually steer his late-night horror show passions to an ultimate creative height. A devotee of Forrest J. Ackerman's *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, EC Comics, Aurora model kits, vintage Hollywood horror movies and screwball comedies, the young Dekker decided to make his own movies. Though his earliest feature project was drafting the story for the film



"THE MONSTER SQUAD WAS VERY MUCH AN ATTEMPT TO DO A CONTEMPORARY *ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN.*" FRED DEKKER



that would eventually become Steve Miner's *House* (1986), and his first assignment as writer/director was with the accomplished sci-fi zombie comedy *Night of the Creeps* (1986), it was his follow-up picture, 1987's nostalgic horror-comedy *The Monster Squad* that has earned the filmmaker a following almost as devoted as he was to the televised terrors of his youth.

The film follows a band of misfit preteens who positively worship monsters of every persuasion. They watch monsters, they draw monsters, they read about monsters and they debate endlessly as to which monster is in fact the coolest of the lot (they also muse about the existence of sexual organs on werewolves, but more on that later...). When an ancient evil in the form of Count Dracula himself (a scene-chomping Christopher Lee-esque Duncan Regehr) wakes from his eternal sleep and raises the rest of his beastly brethren, including the Mummy (Michael Reid MacKay), the Gillman (Oscar-winning effects artist Tom Woodruff Jr.), the Wolfman (Carl Thibault) and the morally conflicted Frankenstein's Monster (touchingly essayed by Oscar-winning actor Tom Noonan), the kids snap into creature fighting mode. Christening themselves The Monster Squad, they enlist the aid of both Professor Van Helsing's diary and the local "scary German guy" (*Amityville 2*'s Leonardo Cimino) to put the stake in Dracula's plot for world domination.

It was a love letter to the Universal monsters, though unfortunately Universal refused to allow the use of their original makeup designs, a serendipitous move that prompted creature FX titan Stan Winston to design his own versions of the classic creatures for the film (see p. 20). The sumptuous and distinctly old-fashioned movie was at odds with the same year's more popular, teen-centric horror offerings, such as *The Lost Boys*. Subsequently, *The Monster Squad* belly-flopped at the box office, appearing briefly on VHS and never receiving a legitimate DVD release.

With two decades of escalating fanboy response and the diligent work of horror hero Michael Felsher (producer of the recent *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* special edition), Lionsgate has finally released *The Monster Squad* as an extras-packed double disc, that the film so badly deserves. On the eve of the picture's 20th anniversary, *Rue Morgue* catches up with Dekker (whose last theatrical feature was 1993's ill-conceived sci-fi sequel *Robocop 3*) to discuss monsters, mayhem and the professional pitfalls of making movies the way you want to make them.



Oscar-winner Tom Noonan as Frankenstein's Monster and (above) the members of the Squad hang out in their clubhouse.



Dracula (Duncan Regehr) in mid-transformation and (below) Phoebe (Ashley Bank) faces the vampire in the final showdown.

Were you a monster fanatic as a child?

Oh yeah. An older friend of mine kind of turned me on to a lot of the cool genre stuff that changed my life. He would show me James Bond, the early Connery films; we went and saw *Planet of the Apes* when it first opened and he was the one that first showed me those amazing Basil Gogos cover paintings for the magazine *Famous Monsters*. And that was it. Forry Ackerman and *Famous Monsters* just pushed me into the world of monsters in a big way and I became totally fascinated.

Can you shed light on the genesis of* The Monster Squad*? Coming-of-age adventure pictures such as* The Goonies *and* Stand By Me *were in vogue at the time. Did you simply crossbreed your love of monsters with something commercially viable?

A lot of people reference stuff like *The Goonies* and *Stand By Me* but they were not on my radar at all, really. See, when I was growing up a great deal of my misspent youth was spent in front of the TV, and apart from my serious love of horror movies and science fiction and weird fantasy films, I was hugely enamoured with the comedies of the '30s and '40s. I loved Abbott and Costello, so obviously when I discovered that *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* actually existed, that it was in fact a real movie, that became the Holy Grail for me. So, to answer your question, *The Monster Squad* was very much an attempt to do a contemporary *Abbott and Costello meet Frankenstein*. But I also loved Laurel and Hardy, The Marx Brothers, W.C. Fields and I absolutely adored The Little Rascals, the old Hal Roach *Our Gang* [movie] series. So really, *Squad* was also me trying to create a new *Little Rascals* more than anything.

In other interviews you've said Dracula was never top of your list in the lexicon of movie monsters.

Well, vampires in general kind of just bore the shit out of me. I mean they have fangs, and there's blood and what have you, but I guess I just never made the sexual connection with them that makes them so timeless as villains. Sex and death are the key components to what makes vampires so interesting and popular to people but neither of those elements were very exciting to me as a little kid.

Why then make him the central antagonist in* The Monster Squad*?

I think Stoker's Oracula himself is an interesting character – this guy that has been around for centuries. And with *Squad*, I needed a master villain who had a plan and the skills in which to enact that plan. As much as I love the other monsters, they don't talk a lot, they aren't very savvy and they're kind of physically awkward. So with Dracula I found a sort of human villain, kind of bringing my love of James Bond villains into it too, which could give a voice and a charisma to the role. I was really lucky to get Ouncan Regehr because he played it straight; he brought a level of conviction that made the whole thing work.

The screenplay was co-written by Shane Black* [Lethal Weapon], *a guy known for some pretty hard action flicks. Did you have to tone down anything in his script to get a PG-13 rating?

Well, Shane is a good friend of mine and he's always loved pulpy crime novels, so when he started writing his own screenplays he went in that direction. But I actually gave Shane his first writing job with *Squad* and I think with him it's more about mystery and fleshing out characters than velocity or blowing stuff up. Shane also loved the Abbott and Costello films, and he really loved this series of novels called *The Three Investigators*. So even though he was in fact bringing a more hard-boiled detective element to the film, I didn't have to change much. Except that he tends to write *really* long so we had to trim quite a bit. I mean we had dozens of vampire brides running around and yes, he did throw in a few big explosions that our budget wouldn't allow.

What about that scene where Dracula calls the little girl a "bitch." Doesn't that cross a line in what was essentially a kid flick?

What I like about it is not that he just calls the little girl a "bitch"; it's after he's walked about 50 yards through the town square just laying waste to everyone in his path, there's a certain tough, invulnerability to him that's pretty cool and I can't recall if that was my addition or Shane's. But I think the darkness that pushes the envelope a bit in the film isn't with stuff like that but the relationships between the parents, the marital problems and pain they are experiencing.

What do you think about Stephen Sommers' Van Helsing, a movie that attempted to resurrect the same monsters that you did with* The Monster Squad*?

Well, when we were getting our movie started, we actually took the project to Universal and said, "Listen, you guys are sitting on a motherlode of amazing classic characters that you're not doing anything with," and they simply weren't interested. I think with the Sommers film, which was a





Van Helsing (the late Jack Gwillim) throws down with one of Dracula's dead dudes.

Universal picture, they attempted to completely reinvent what the monsters looked like, to fix what wasn't broke. They made them all CGI and turned it into a video game. I really didn't care for it at all and I think it was a mistake. Today, there's just so many compromises made on the business side of creating a film that there is definitely something missing.

The three features you directed – Night of the Creeps, The Monster Squad and even Robocop 3 – ostensibly are sci-fi or horror, but it's tough to place them easily into one genre category.

Well, I love blending genres, I find it really interesting. I've said this before, but I'm really bored with one-note movies. I hate comedies that never turn serious and I hate serious films that never have a laugh, so the more I look at my movies, especially *Night of the Creeps* – and ignore the problems with it, as they are plentiful – I've always liked how it takes all these different tones and styles and genres and chucks them into a blender on purée. *Monster Squad* is the same way. My favourite movie is *Jaws* and I think it's a great example of this approach. I'm also a huge Michael Mann fan and he always does this. *Manhunter* is such a fantastic film.

Is that why you hired Tom Noonan for The Monster Squad? Because of his turn as Francis Dollarhyde in Manhunter?

Actually that was Rob Cohen's idea. Rob was one of my producers, as well as now being a very accomplished director in his own right, and he was from the Michael Mann school. He had directed some episodes of *Miami Vice* and *Crime Story*, Mann's other TV show that never took off. Rob put the idea in my head to approach Tom to be the Frankenstein's monster and it was a great idea that worked really well.

Back to your long history with monsters. Your first official assignment in Hollywood was to helm a big budget 3-D version of Godzilla with director Steve Miner. What happened to that project? Sounds cool!

You know, it really was. But ultimately, I think it was just way too ambitious for the time. Steve had only made a couple of *Friday the 13th* films, as well as *House* – a film that I drafted the story for – and I think that it was way too big for its britches. The idea was to create this movie where *Godzilla* just levels San Francisco, very much in the vein of an Irwin Allen film with a big cast and many characters – a full-scale disaster film.

Any plans to revive the idea?

Well, I think Roland Emmerich pretty much jammed the nail in that coffin, which is too bad because, much like I was saying about the *Van Helsing* movie, Roland's Godzilla is not Godzilla. Neither film took what was special and unique about these characters and rendered it in any kind of interesting way. The whole philosophy here is to "rethink it." And I have to ask why someone is remaking something if they so obviously don't give a damn about it in the first place? I mean John Carpenter *loved* the Howard Hawks version of *The Thing*, and I think Carpenter's *The Thing* may be his best movie. Why? Because he changed it but kept the structure and went back to the original story and didn't just change stuff for the sake of changing it. And I think that's what a lot of directors are doing now.

MONSTER SQUAD star ANDRÉ GOWER lets loose his love for the movie that made him famous among horror fans.



"If we pull this off, I'm gonna shit!" observes Sean, as his ragtag group of neighbourhood kids prepare to battle the infernal forces of darkness in *The Monster Squad*. André Gower, who was barely a teen when he played Sean two decades ago, may not have saved the world from Dracula and his minions in real life, but he relishes the fact that all these years later, the once-obscure B-movie has pulled off what few genre films have: it's now a bona fide cult classic.

"I am actually enjoying the hell out of it!" he exclaims. "I'd hang out with *Monster Squad* fans over most people any day!"

Since the recent resurgence of interest in the film, Gower has joined director Fred Dekker and other cast members at *Monster Squad* screenings and convention appearances. He also provides a commentary and other supplementary material on Lionsgate's special edition DVD release. Although the monsters are the initial draw for genre fans, he says everyone can relate to the film's protagonists.

"I think one of the main reasons [for the film's success], is that everyone can find someone in the film that they relate to: the focused leader, the cool kid with bitchin' hair, the next-door neighbor, the little sister and, yes ..even the fat kid."

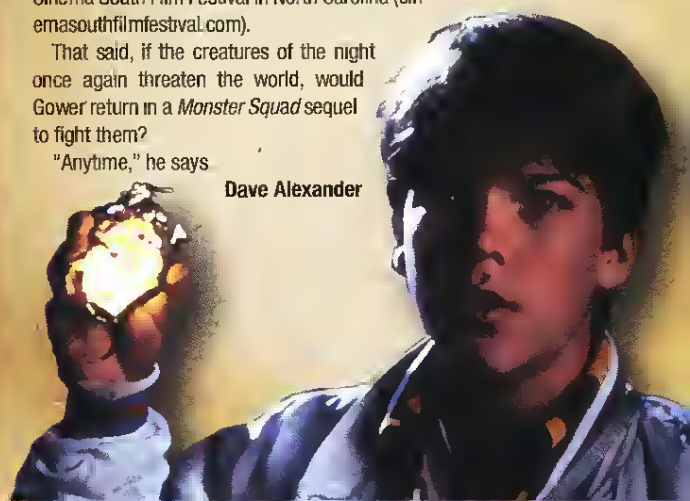
Gower recalls that the kids in the film were nearly as close as the kids playing them. They went to school, pulled pranks and generally hung out together. "We actually got along pretty well for being such a diverse set – in terms of age range and experience – and I think that has a lot to do with the way Fred handled everyone. He made a point to relate and befriend each and every one of us as individuals, but also as a cohesive group: The Squad. And I think that translated to the screen."

After his turn in *The Monster Squad*, Gower continued to act, appearing in commercials and various network TV shows until he graduated high school and went to college in North Carolina to play basketball. After getting a degree in Mass Communications he became a sports writer and worked in sports broadcasting, all while writing film and TV projects on the side. In 2002, he formed his own production company, started acting again and this month debuts his Cinema South Film Festival in North Carolina (cinemasouthfilmfestival.com).

That said, if the creatures of the night once again threaten the world, would Gower return in a *Monster Squad* sequel to fight them?

"Anytime," he says.

Dave Alexander





Defeating Dracula: *Patrick (Robby Kiger), his sister (Lisa Fuller) and "Scary German Guy" (Leonardo Cimino) invoke a spell.*

***Weren't you also in line to direct* Final Destination *and* Pitch Black.**

Yeah, well they were offered to me before they were scripts. In the case of *Pitch Black*, it was just that. I was told it was about a planet that got dark and bad stuff happens and it was so vague that I couldn't make it out, couldn't figure out how to make a story out of the concept. And *Final Destination* just didn't appeal to me, making a movie where just a bunch of kids get killed off.

What will it take to get you back in the director's chair?

Well, my lack of output hasn't totally been by choice, believe me. I mean *Robocop 3* was a huge blow to my career; I was really depressed at the reception of that picture. And it's a case of lack of momentum. In this business you should always have your next movie on the board before the last one opens so if your movie comes out and it bombs, you're waiting in the wings with your next film ready to go. After *Robocop*, I wasn't. So weeks turned into months into years and, well, it happens. But I've been trying to reinvent myself. I have two pictures on the board right now, one that's a straight horror picture and one that's an apocalypse film produced by Eric Newman [*Dawn of the Dead* remake, *Slither*, *Children of Meri*]. We just have to find a lead.

Are you surprised at the cult revival of* Creeps *and* Squad*?

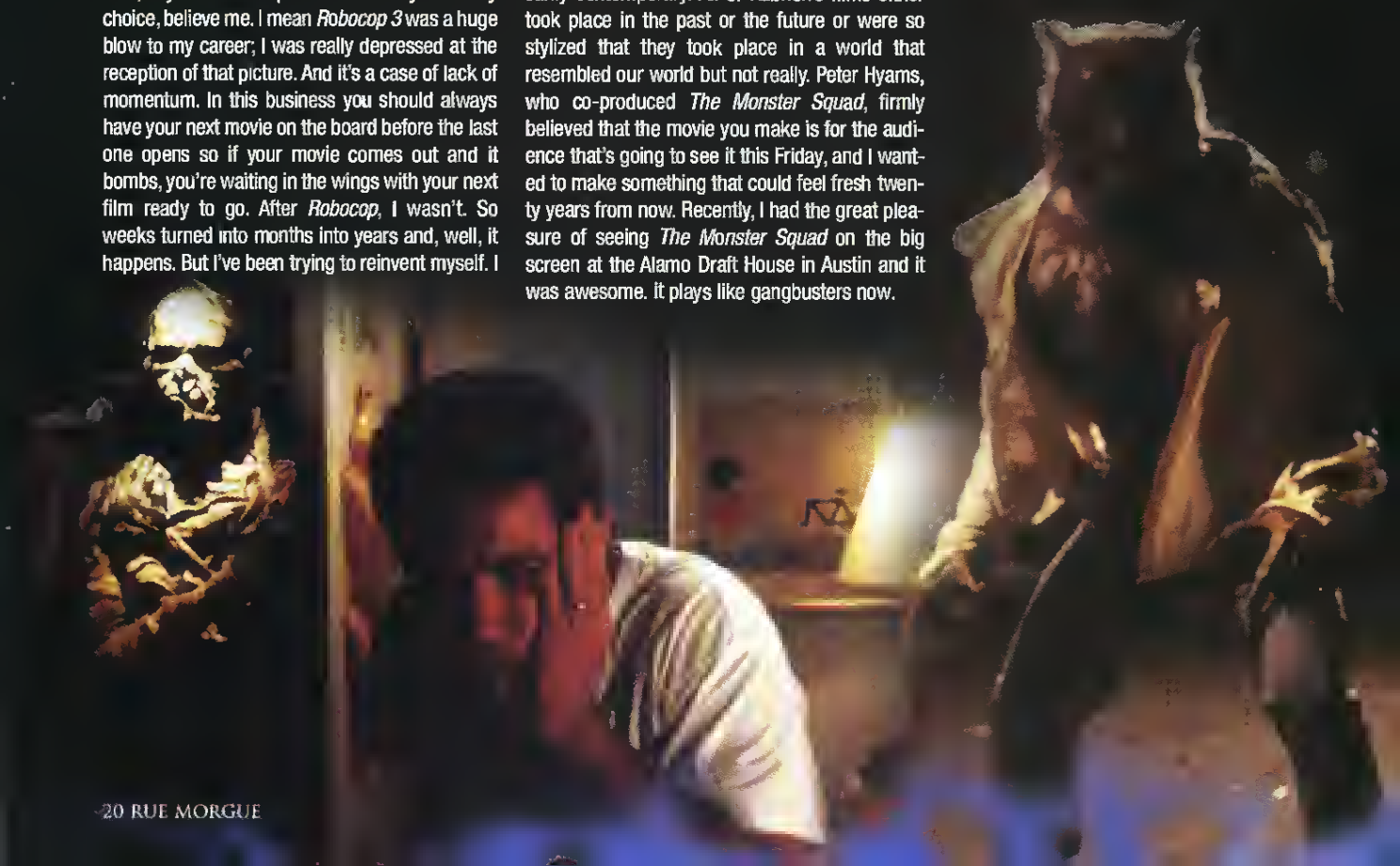
I feel vindicated, actually. I also think that the stuff that truly stands the test of time is better stuff. I'm a huge Stanley Kubrick fan and one of the things that I think that he very consciously did in his career is to make films that were never necessarily contemporary. All of Kubrick's films either took place in the past or the future or were so stylized that they took place in a world that resembled our world but not really. Peter Hyams, who co-produced *The Monster Squad*, firmly believed that the movie you make is for the audience that's going to see it this Friday, and I wanted to make something that could feel fresh twenty years from now. Recently, I had the great pleasure of seeing *The Monster Squad* on the big screen at the Alamo Draft House in Austin and it was awesome. It plays like gangbusters now.

Rue Morgue *screened the film last year to similar effect.*

Yeah! The movie still really works and it has a pretty loyal fan base. Now, do I wish that it had done better when it was released? Well, obviously, because I would have ended up making a lot more movies since then. But I'm very happy to have made a couple of movies that people really love rather than have a resume ripe with crappy, churned-out stuff.

So what took so long to get* The Monster Squad *on DVD anyway?

Titles that aren't successful are usually involved in fire sales. *The Monster Squad* ended up changing hands so many times that it became a labyrinth as to who actually owned it. The real hero of this story is a guy named Michael Felsher. Michael did some research and found out that *Monster Squad* was in a library owned by, I think, Republic or Spelling or Viacom or something. He followed it around and then read one day in a trade magazine that that particular library had been bought by Lionsgate. So he started bugging Lionsgate and they confirmed this and they let him produce this new DVD. If it wasn't for him, for his love of my movie, who knows what would have happened to it! And trust me: everything about this release is going to be fantastic. The remastered print is so incredible that there are many shots that I hadn't seen since I saw them through the lens of my Panaflex. *That's* how sharp the transfer is.





Fred Dekker on the set of ***The Monster Squad*** *and (below) the Creature (Tom Woodruff Jr.) rises.*

Is it true that you were approached to remake the film?

Well, yeah, but I'm not particularly interested in remakes. I'm much more interested in sequels. I like the idea of taking the original story and deepening the established mythology. I'd love to do a *Monster Squad* sequel and I have a great idea of having these kids, now adults, slightly burned out, having hit their personal peaks at such a young age. Then a new evil force rears its head and these guys are pushed back into action, essentially picking back up where they left off.

And what would that evil force be? Godzilla perhaps?

Actually, I had thought about Godzilla at one point. But the problem is that all the really good monsters have been used now. And if we're meant to be true to the Universal canon, there's just no one really left. I'm not sure who the force would be; I'd have to think about that.

Final question: how many times a year do you think someone says to you, "The Wolfman's got nards?"

You know, it's occurred to me just in this past year that the thing that's perhaps disingenuous about that statement is that, well, Frankenstein's monster has nards. They're probably enormous, but he's probably got them. Dracula has got nards. Creature – meh, maybe not because he's amphibious and you can't see them in the movie. Mummy's are probably long since shrivelled up – but my point is that there's nothing exclusive about nards to the Wolfman. So when I hear that quote – and yeah, I hear it a lot, I kind of shrug and say, "So what, most monsters have them." The fat kid was perhaps a bit slow on the uptake.



STAN WINSTON unmasks the mad science of makin' monsters the old-fashioned way.

CREATURE CRAFT

Special effects legend Stan Winston had a hand in bringing to life movie creatures as diverse as the title ghoul in *Pumpkinhead*, the malevolent ETs in the *Alien* series, killer cyborgs in the *Terminator* movies, live-action dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* and the disfigured inbreds in *Wrong Turn*. Yet, *The Monster Squad* will always hold a special place in his heart for one reason in particular: the Wolfman. "Werewolves have always been my favourite character," Winston admits. "It was always the character I wanted to give a special spin to. We tried some special things with *Monster Squad*."

Working under the constraints of a low budget and limited time, Winston and his effects crew at Stan Winston Studios – including Tom Woodruff Jr., who played the Gillman in the film – crafted some of their most ambitious creatures.

"Believe it or not, I used my own face as a reference for some of the attitude of that werewolf," says Winston. "I spread the eyes so they weren't the actor's eyes, they were actually animatronic. They didn't work the way our animatronics work today – they didn't have enough movement or *range* of movement in the character but it is still an interesting character."

Starting with original sketches, Winston designed the monsters – the Wolfman, Dracula, Frankenstein's Monster, The Mummy and the Gillman (see p.22) – for the film with instructions that the creatures pay tribute to the classic Universal baddies but still retain their own look.

As he explains, the filmmakers were walking a fine line. "One of the things that we had to be very careful of was that although we were doing a movie that was 'take-off' on the Universal classics, we had to be careful none of our designs infringed on the original designs of the Universal characters. There were subtle changes; we had to be sure that nothing specific about them could be considered a copyright infringement of a design."

Ironically, the creatures look a damn sight better than Universal's own (digital) disaster creature feature from a few years ago, *Van Helsing*. There's just no denying the charm of seeing those classic-looking movie monsters brought to life sans CGI – flaws and all.

"The artistic concepts I think were good; in the final analysis, I wasn't pleased with the complete performance ability of the characters," admits Winston, who keeps replicas of the *Monster Squad* monsters in his studio. "But we did push the envelope."

Dave Alexander



RUE MORGUE REUNITES ALL FIVE OF THE LEGENDARY GHOULS THAT TERRORIZED THE MONSTER SQUAD.

BADASS BLOODSUCKER



by JOVANKA VUCKOVIC

***When was the last time you saw* The Monster Squad?**

At a screening in the mid-1980s. I enjoyed it, but I never like watching myself very much. Also, I spend most of my time – outside of acting in films – painting, writing and preparing for exhibitions of my art [see Regehr's art at duncanregehr.com], which is why I never seem to have time to watch anything. But enough excuses, I will make time to watch it again soon.

Were you a fan of the Universal Dracula when you took on this role?

I have always loved the original Bram Stoker novel, which was written in the form of letters and journals kept by the principal characters. The movies starring Béla Lugosi and Christopher Lee are terrific. The history of Vlad the Impaler, which has been loosely connected to the story of Dracula, fascinated me as a child. I felt privileged to play it. Recently, I completed a limited edition of drawings/graphics entitled "Vlad," as a sort of respectful nod to the Dracula character.

You've continued to work in the horror/sci-fi genre, what keeps you coming back to it?

The sci-fi/fantasy/horror genre is a realm of limitless possibilities, a playground for the imagination. As an artist I find that very attractive.

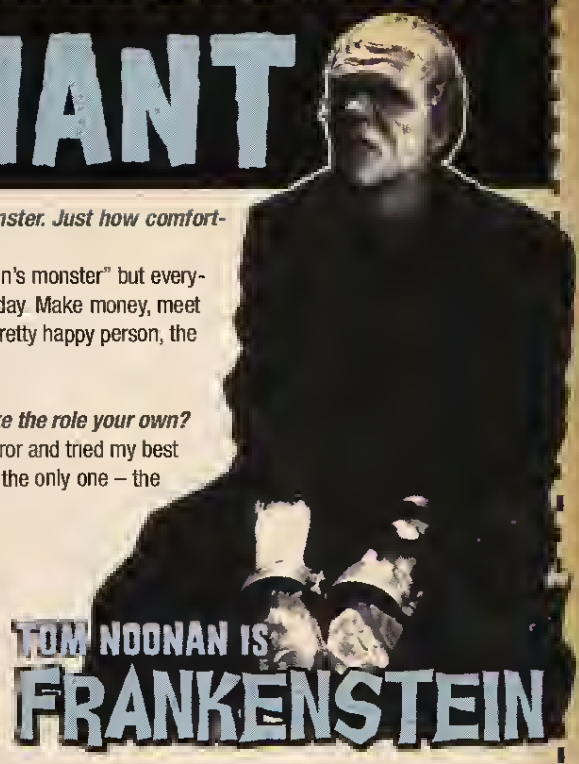
Do you enjoy playing villains more than heroes?

Villains have more fun! As in the case of Dracula, they know exactly what they want and will go to impossible lengths to get it. I would say that unless the hero has a lot of character depth it is usually more challenging to play the villain.

Why do you think this film has become such a cult classic?

I think the film appeals to all ages, so a family can watch it together ... maybe watching it on at least an annual basis for Halloween, and perhaps it has become somewhat like Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, a must-see at Christmas. Also, I imagine that because it hasn't been so readily available it hasn't become overexposed like a lot films.

A GENTLE GIANT



TOM NOONAN IS FRANKENSTEIN

In the extras on the* Monster Squad *DVD, you do an interview as Frankenstein's Monster. Just how comfortable are you playing this particular fiend?
I feel *very* good about it. I guess I think of Frankenstein (I know it's technically "Frankenstein's monster" but everybody, and me, thinks of me as Frankenstein) as just another guy, trying to get through the day. Make money, meet girls and not hurt anyone. So I'm pretty comfortable being who I am as Frankenstein. I'm a pretty happy person, the whole "fiend" aspect you're pushing, I just don't relate to.

Okay, what did you bring to the much-portrayed Frankenstein's Monster to really make the role your own?
Nothing in particular, really. I put on the clothes, combed my hair, looked at myself in the mirror and tried my best to get what I needed in each individual scene. As far as I'm concerned, I'm Frankenstein – the only one – the only one there ever has been and ever will be. That's who I am.

Aside from your height, was there anything specific that helped get you this role?
I had just finished a movie called *Manhunter* [playing the role of "The Tooth Fairy" killer], which probably made Fred Dekker think I was someone who could help his movie

What was more rewarding to play, a fantastic monster, as in* The Monster Squad, *or a human monster, as in* Manhunter*?
I don't think of myself as a monster. I'm just a guy in a difficult situation trying to do his best.

Overall, how would you describe the experience of making the film?
I liked making the movie and it's great to do something you like that has an impact on people – making a difference is one of the funnest things in life.

Are there any monsters out there you'd really love to play?
If you keep telling me that I'm a monster and fiend I may enjoy tracking you down and talking to you about what it's like to be me – and maybe hearing what it's like to be you.

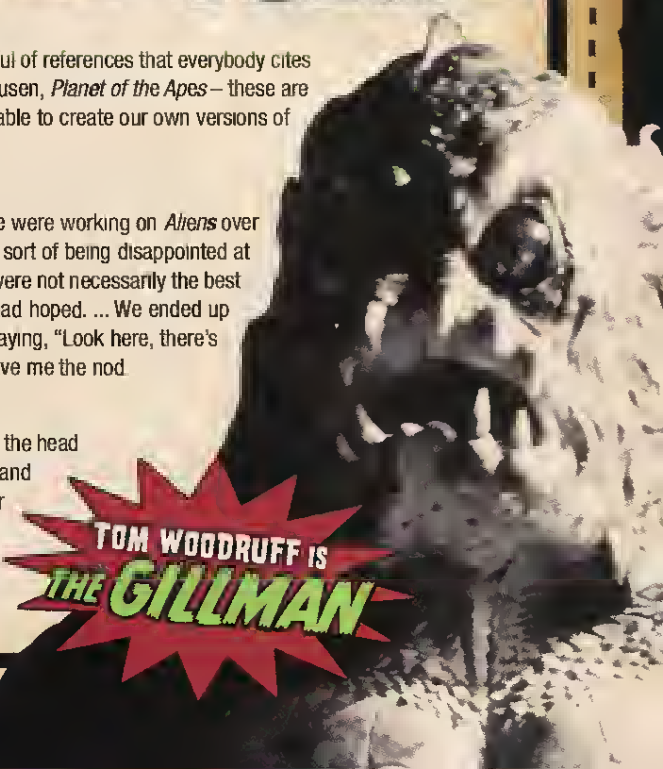
FISH-FACED FIEND



Were you a Universal monsters fan when you came on board?
Absolutely! I think we all were at Stan [Winston]'s; guys my age, there's that same handful of references that everybody cites as the reason they got into doing what they do. It's the Universal monsters, Ray Harryhausen, *Planet of the Apes* – these are the same [things] that drove us all as kids to want to be able to be in this world, to be able to create our own versions of these creatures.

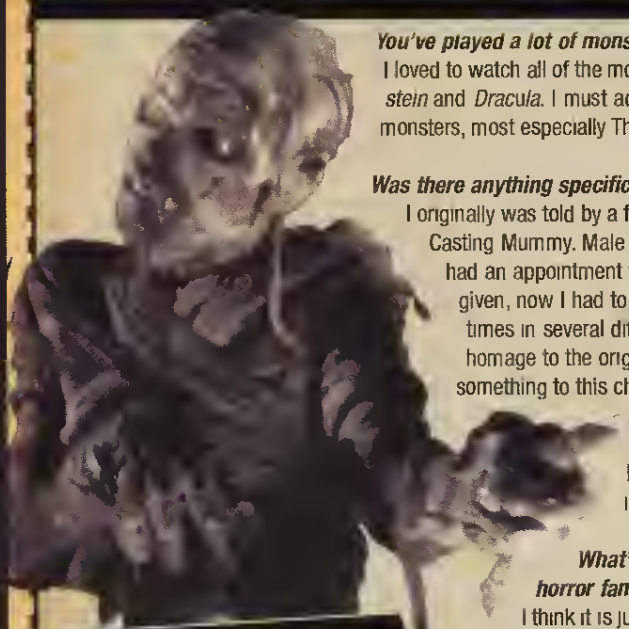
How'd you score the role of the Gillman?
Ever since I was a kid I wanted to be the guy in the monster suit. I remember when we were working on *Aliens* over in London – I never said anything to Stan about wanting to do this, but I remember just sort of being disappointed at the way we would build suits and they'd go onto stuntmen, and some of the stuntmen were not necessarily the best guys. They weren't exactly the right size or they weren't quite as physically fit as we had hoped. ... We ended up starting on the project, I remember having this body cast and showing it to Stan and saying, "Look here, there's already a body cast of me, couldn't I do this?" We talked about it for a while, and he gave me the nod.

How comfortable was the suit?
It was a full body suit and that particular character, when we put the hands and feet and the head on, all those pieces got glued down because we wanted to keep all those edges clean and not compromise the look of the suit. I stayed in the whole thing all day and I remember even to this date, it was the longest time I've ever spent glued into a suit. We did thirteen hours one day. That was absolutely miserable because that meant no breaks, there was no bathroom break. I took in very little food, very little water, but I was just so totally committed to it that at the time it just didn't matter.



TOM WOODRUFF IS THE GILLMAN

ONE DUSTY DUDE



MICHAEL REID MACKAY IS THE MUMMY

You've played a lot of monsters over the course of your career – you must be a fan.

I loved to watch all of the monster films growing up and saw all of them *Mummy*, *Wolfman*, *The Creature*, *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*. I must admit that after doing *Monster Squad* I developed a special place in my heart for these monsters, most especially The Mummy of course!

Was there anything specific that helped get you this role, other than your otherworldly thinness?

I originally was told by a friend that there was an ad in *Variety* for casting. The ad said "Untitled Action Adventure. Casting Mummy. Male 5'5" – 5'8", extremely thin, borderline anorexic type," and that I should try out. I then had an appointment to meet the director Fred Dekker and the producer at the Sony lot. My thinness was a given, now I had to make this mummy character come to life. Fred had me walk across the room several times in several different ways. He liked the way I flexed my hands and fingers. I dragged my back leg in homage to the original. Any direction he gave me, I would try to create. I would like to think that I brought something to this character that he liked.

Are there any monsters you haven't played yet that you'd really like to do?

Not really. I've always been open to the challenge of portraying anything. I haven't been in the monster loop for a while.

What's your take on this oddball little genre film becoming such a cult favourite among horror fans?

I think it is just great! I am proud of this little film. It put me on the map, so to speak. I was talking to someone recently who said, "I loved that film when I was a kid!! You were the mummy?" There is something endearing about having all of our classic monsters together; a reunion if you will. I think kids really like this movie because it gives them control over the scariness in that the Monster Squad is taking control of the situation. And... they're kids.



THE BEAST WITH BITE

I hear you got your Screen Actors Guild card through the movie just by having the right body type for The Wolfman.

They had looked at just about every actor out there through SAG that fit the bill, but they were looking for a certain size and physicality, and Stan Winston had already drawn The Wolfman and they wanted features that were gonna be close to the Wolfman, so that they [could] build this whole costume around it. For whatever reason I fit all that, and the physicality, and gave them what they were looking for. So it was a pretty cool story, and I got my SAG card.

Was this a dream come true for you to play a monster?

When I was a kid, Halloween was my favourite time of the year and to be doing The Wolfman and being on all these different sets with Frankenstein, The Mummy and Dracula – all those creatures that you grew up with, you know, Universal Studios monsters – it was a pretty cool thing and I knew that then. And as I promote my film *Garage* right now, they comment on that a lot. They'll put down "Carl Thibault, yes, The Wolfman from *Monster Squad*, writing/directing debut."

Just how hot was that furry suit?

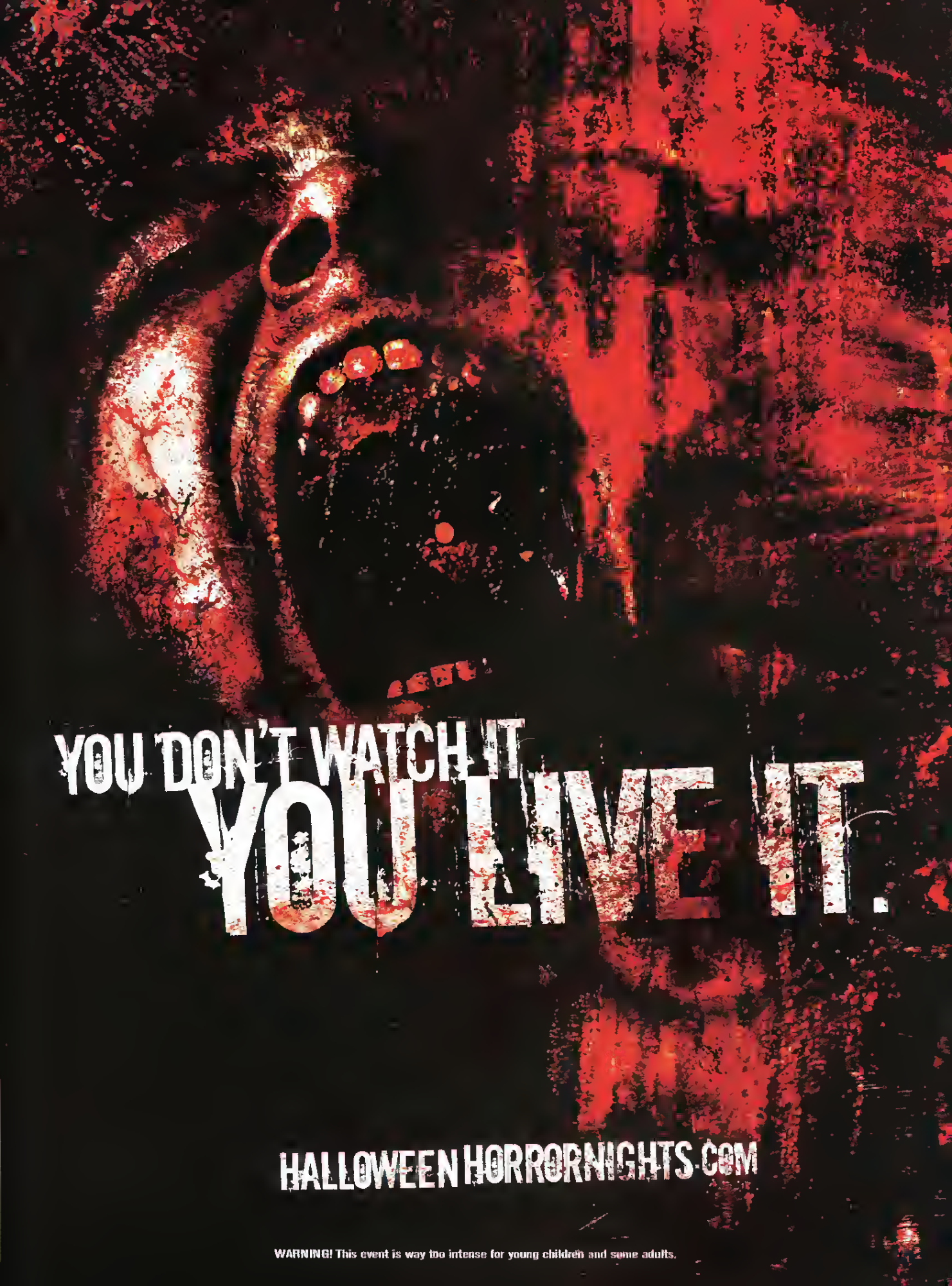
It was a lot of work, it wasn't easy. Inside that suit I would sweat every single night. It was a pretty intense thing.

Tell us about the transformation sequence in the film.

I'm much bigger than Jonathan Gries [the pre-transformation human-half of the Wolfman]. I'm 6'2", 200 pounds, and I don't know how big Jon is, but they wanted this guy to get bigger. So he played the "Desperate Man" – which is the guy you see in human form and then in the transformation scene inside the phone booth, it starts off with him. The in-between is actually a mechanical bust that they used to do the morphing of the face when it stretches and all that stuff, then – bam! – it turns into me, and I do the busting out of the phone booth and running up the street and everything.



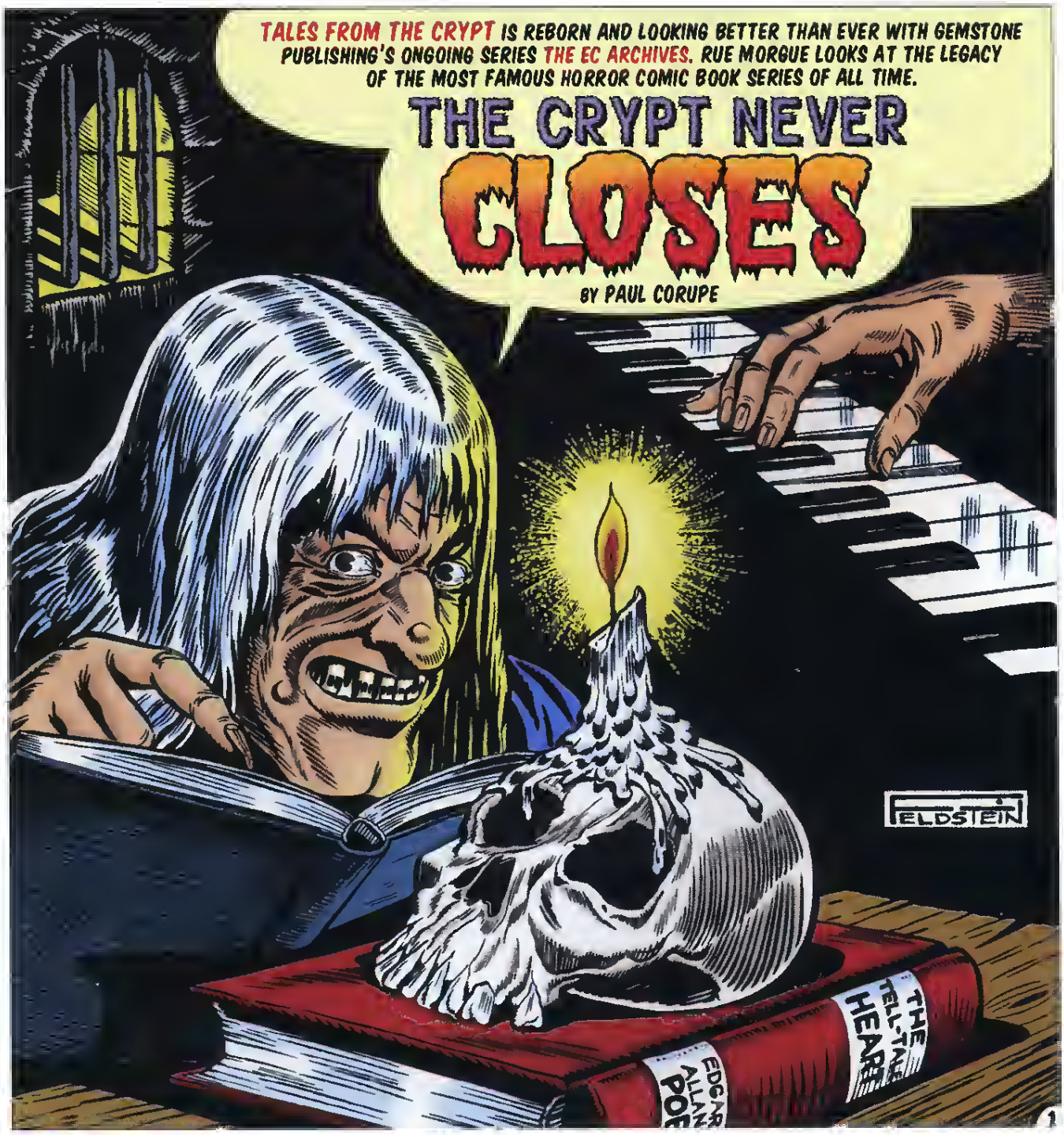
CARL THIBAULT IS THE WOLFMAN


YOU DON'T WATCH IT.
YOU LIVE IT.
HALLOWEENHORRORNIGHTS.COM
WARNING! This event is way too intense for young children and some adults.

TALES FROM THE CRYPT IS REBORN AND LOOKING BETTER THAN EVER WITH GEMSTONE PUBLISHING'S ONGOING SERIES THE EC ARCHIVES. RUE MORGUE LOOKS AT THE LEGACY OF THE MOST FAMOUS HORROR COMIC BOOK SERIES OF ALL TIME.

THE CRYPT NEVER CLOSES

BY PAUL CORUPE



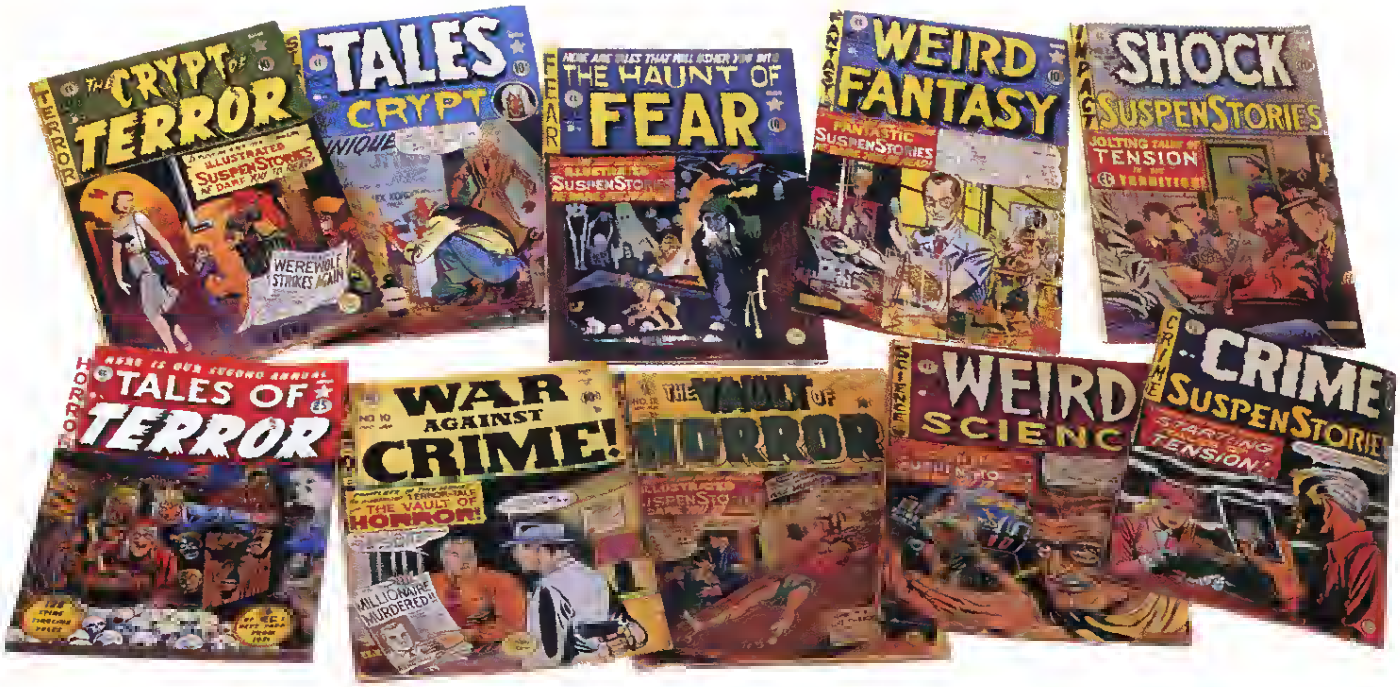
When 25-year-old Bill Gaines was unexpectedly thrust into the role of publisher and co-editor at EC Comics, he couldn't have been less interested – after all, these cheap, gaudy newsprint publications were kid's stuff, right? Not always, it turns out, as Gaines' early indifference eventually turned into passion, thanks to the gory potential of a pen and ink army of shuffling corpses. In just a few years, EC's trend-setting, adult-minded titles – including the first horror comic, *Tales from the Crypt* – built the company up into one of the most influential publishers of the decade. *Tales from the Crypt*'s taut storytelling, unrestrained bloodbaths and notorious "shock" twist endings have now been collected in a series of authoritative colour reissues from Gemstone Publishing titled *The EC Archives: Tales from the Crypt*.

Although *Tales from the Crypt* and EC Comics' other horror publications spent a mere five years on newsstands after being introduced in 1950, the groundbreaking titles have been consistently revived in some form every decade since their publication, in everything from reprinted collections to films and television shows, proving their enduring appeal.

"I think the answer is quality," ventures Russ Cochran, the Missouri-based publisher of *The EC Archives*. A fan since his teens, Cochran has unfailingly reprinted original EC comics and artwork since 1971.

"The stories and layouts were intelligent and beautifully constructed," he adds. "Reading an Al Feldstein story, you noticed that he used words that mostly were for adults. He never wrote down to his audience – I loved that. Then add the art of the fabulous EC stable of artists and you have the best comics ever done."

The Gaines family's involvement in the comics business goes right back to the very dawn of the medium when, in 1933, Bill's father Max Gaines hit



upon an idea to republish older daily newspaper comics as a bound anthology to sell on newsstands. Packaging together past strips from popular titles such as "Reg'lar Fellers," "Hairbreadth Harry" and "Joe Palooka" under the catch-all title *Famous Funnies*, he created what is now regarded as the forefather of the modern comic book, a surprise success that virtually kick-started the entire industry. By convincing future DC Comics owner Harry Donenfeld to publish *Superman*, as well as helping to design other prominent characters, including Wonder Woman and the Green Lantern, the elder Gaines continued to play a key role in the evolution of the medium until 1944, when he decided to drastically change directions once again. Selling his interests in the soaring superhero trend to DC, he started his own company, Educational Comics, to deal exclusively in high-minded publications such as *Picture Stories from the Bible* and *Picture Stories from American History*, alongside kiddie-oriented titles *Animal Fables* and *Tiny Tot Comics*.

Not surprisingly, these well-meaning comics couldn't compete with the thrilling adventures and square-jawed heroes regularly published by EC's competitors. In 1947, with the company slowly sinking into debt, another tragedy struck – Max Gaines was killed in a boating accident, leaving his crumbling comics empire in the hands of his son, Bill, who was training to be a science teacher at the time. Though at first the younger Gaines deferred his duties to a hired business manager, the more comics he read, the more he wanted to take a shot at heading up the flagging company.

"I WAS ALWAYS FASCINATED WITH THE OLD RADIO HORROR SHOWS: *THE WITCH'S TALE*, *LIGHTS OUT*, *INNER SANCTUM*."
EC WRITER/ILLUSTRATOR, AL FELDSTEIN

Jettisoning the high-minded and funny animal comics favoured by his father, Gaines' first order of business was to change the name of the company from "Educational Comics" to "Entertaining Comics" and expand his roster to include more sensational offerings like *Saddle Justice* and *Crime Patrol*. He also began to assemble a crack team of artists who would soon come to define EC's unique style: Harvey Kurtzman, Johnny Craig, Jack Davis, Wally Wood, Jack Kamen and Graham Ingels, to name a few.

No contributor played more of a key role in the development of EC and its move towards horror than early arrival Al Feldstein. Feldstein, now 81, currently lives on a ranch in Montana and concentrates on fine art painting, though he is still the subject of many extensive interviews on his EC days. As Feldstein explained to documentary filmmaker Chip Selby in 2000, it was through his encouragement that Bill Gaines became a leader in the industry instead of simply playing catch-up on the latest trends.

"We chatted about what we liked, and I told him that one of the things that I was always fascinated with was the old radio horror shows: *The Witch's Tale*, *Lights Out*, *Inner Sanctum*. I remember, when I was young, climbing down the stairs while my brother was listening to these shows at midnight. So I said, 'Why don't we do Gothic horror in comics? Scare the pants off the kids!'"

To help convince Gaines that his nightmarish visions would sell, Feldstein wrote and illustrated a story called "Return from the Grave" for *Crime Patrol* 15 (January, 1950), published under the banner headline "The Crypt of Terror." Inspired by Old Nancy, a hag character who introduced each radio episode of *The Witch's Tale*, the piece was prefaced with a few comments by the Crypt Keeper, a creepy figure in a tattered robe who boasted about the undeniably blood-chilling contents of the story. The Gothic shocker "The Spectre in the Castle" appeared in the next issue. It was soon followed by a deluge of eager fan mail that proved EC's innovative take on horror was a runaway success.

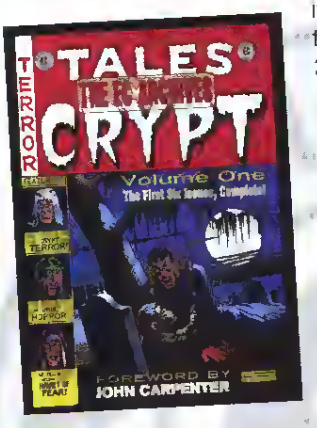
Due to a loophole in the postage laws that made it cheaper for Gaines to simply rename existing comics rather than register new titles, the 17th issue of *Crime Patrol* was officially rechristened *The Crypt of Terror*, and then, a few months later, *Tales from the Crypt*, leading what became known as EC's "New Trend" wave, alongside *Weird Science*, *Weird Fantasy*, *Two-Fisted Tales*, *Frontline Combat*, *Crime SuspenStories*, *Shock SuspenStories* and, later, the satirical *MAD* magazine. Two other EC horror comics appeared on newsstands at this time as well – *War Against Crime*, which had earlier printed two horror stories from artist Johnny Craig, became *The Vault of Horror*, while *Gunfighter* was retitled



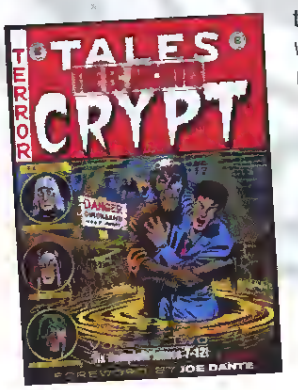


William Gaines (left) and Al Feldstein in the EC office, 1950.

The Haunt of Fear. As with *The Crypt of Terror*, each of these titles was distinguished by its own unique host – the Vault Keeper and the Old Witch joined the Crypt Keeper to make up the GhouLunatics, threesome whose purpose was to balance out some of the more disturbing aspects of the stories with a steady stream of gruesome puns and graveyard humour.



With *Tales from the Crypt* and their other horror titles, Gaines and Feldstein began to dole out bimonthly doses of death and dismemberment that far exceeded even the most daring 1950s horror films, which rarely spilled even a single drop of blood. These classic comics' bold depictions of gruesome murder, graphic torture and legions of flesh-eating ghouls would be considered lurid even today, but in the emerging suburban culture of post-war North America, they were positively subversive, tearing down the carefully painted white picket fences to reveal dark dreams and desires underneath. It's no wonder that many young readers who grew up on Walt Disney's candy-coated fantasies or the wholesome high school hijinks of Archie and Jughead became lifelong EC fans after skimming a particularly shocking story, later introducing their children and their children's children to the illicit pleasures within.



One of the series' most famous fans is filmmaker Joe Dante (*Piranha*, *Gremlins*, *The 'Burbs*), whose own work displays a similar mix of black humour and macabre morality. He writes the introduction to the second volume in the Gemstone series (available July 30).

"I can attest to the fact that EC comics were genuinely disturbing to me as a kid, but also, obviously, fascinating," he says. "Nightmares? You bet. But that's always been the appeal of horror subjects. Like riding a roller coaster, you face the inevitability of death safely. The times, however, were pretty straitlaced and these transgressive images upset a lot of authority figures to the point that, at my local New Jersey store, the horror comics were segregated from the general run of 'zines and kids were discouraged from buying them."

What also distinguished EC's comics – and continues to make an impression on readers today – was a final panel that featured deeply ironic comeuppance, whether it was a zombie who returns from the grave to avenge his death, a man who realizes he has been dead for the entire story or, in one intense case, the corrupt owner of a home for the blind forced into a maze lined with razor blades, just as the lights go out.

"We hooked onto the snap-ending thing because I was always an O. Henry fan," Feldstein revealed to Selby. "I loved O. Henry stories, especially the ones with shock endings and twists, like the guy who sells his watch to get the girl the hair brush, but she sold her hair to get the guy the watch fob – that kind of thing."

Feldstein was soon writing almost all of the scripts for EC, collaborating closely with Gaines, who often stayed up all night devouring pulp novels and short stories to come up with idea "springboards." Later, the two would elaborate on these basic concepts, and Feldstein would write the captions and dialogue directly on illustration boards, and give them to the artists.

EC was known for encouraging individual artistic styles, and Feldstein also smartly tailored each story towards a particular artist's strengths. Originally brought in to work on western and romance titles, but later consigned to do the cover and lead stories for *The Haunt of Fear*, "Ghastly" Graham Ingels was particularly adept at undead monsters, with his dripping, nightmarish technique that seemed to ooze off the page, while Jack Davis, who took over for Feldstein, brought a scratchy, highly detailed look to *Tales from the Crypt*. Johnny Craig continued to anchor *The Vault of Horror* with some of EC's most graphic images – severed arms and heads, bloodstained axes, and hands bursting out of freshly dug graves, which sometimes seemed at odds with his cleanly drawn and carefully planned style. Other house artists began to specialize in certain types of horror stories, Jack Kamen handled many of the "Gnrm Fairy Tales," macabre and gory stories based on fables like *Hansel and Gretel*, or ones set against a medieval setting that appeared in all three books.

These tales had many devoted fans who couldn't get enough of their nastiness, including Cochran. "I have several favourites, but in one," he recalls, "the royal subjects, which had been treated with cruelty by a pompous king and queen, force live rats down their throats, sew their mouths shut, and cheer as the rats ate their way out!"

It was stories like this that made EC's work so highly regarded and successful, spawning hundreds of hastily produced imitations from their competitors, none of which achieved the same lasting significance. But the sudden surge of horror comics didn't last long.

In 1954, prominent psychiatrist Dr. Fredric Wertham's book *Seduction of the Innocent* mounted an all-out attack on the comics industry, especially the bloody horror and deviant crime titles that he saw as a direct cause of juvenile delinquency. The uproar against funnybook indecency reached its peak when a US Senate Subcommittee investigation was launched that same year, which prompted Gaines to volunteer to defend *Tales from the Crypt* and his other books. After they listened to his impassioned statement, the committee members took the opportunity to grill Gaines on some of his more violent covers and stories, such as *The Haunt of Fear*'s infamous "Foul Play."

Feldstein later admitted to Selby that he felt



An introductory panel featuring The Old Witch, illustrated by Graham Ingels.

they did go too far on occasion, as with "Foul Play," in which a baseball team uses the corpse of an opposing player that murdered their teammate as equipment, including his decapitated head as the ball and a trail of intestines to mark the baseline.

"Yeah, we overstepped the bounds a bit on that," he said. "I think it's a natural phenomenon to try and top yourself. But there was a kind of desperation; we were doing four stories a week, and we had to keep the reader interested. Yeah, it was gory, [but] today, *Friday the 13th* would laugh at it!"

Though nothing officially came of the hearings, in the months that followed, Gaines proposed the establishment of the Comics Code Authority, an organization of comics publishers who could help clean up the industry's image. In a twist of fate almost worthy of *Tales from the Crypt*, it was this very code that ultimately led to EC's undoing, as the group voted to ban the words "terror," "horror" and "crime" from comic book titles and published a Code that extolled "high standards of morality and good taste." Forced to give up his trend-setting horror titles, Gaines angrily quit the Authority and tried a series of "New Direction" comics, which included titles like *Aces High* and *Psychoanalysis*, but only *MAD* magazine continued to sell. The readers weren't the only ones turned off by the industry's newly watered-down stories, though.

"I gave up reading comic books after I became Editor of *MAD*," Feldstein tells *Rue Morgue*. "As a result of the Comics Code Authority's idiotic and self-castrating repression of creativity, I had no interest in their vapid contents."

But the Authority's death blow couldn't suppress audience interest. In 1964, not even ten years after the Comics Code Authority first wiped out EC's supposedly detrimental comics, Ballantine Books became the first to reprint several *Tales from the Crypt* stories in a paperback book. Shortly thereafter, Cochran began to publish his lavish, oversized *EC Portfolios*. The then-professor of physics at Drake University, Cochran had developed a friendship with Gaines and Feldstein.

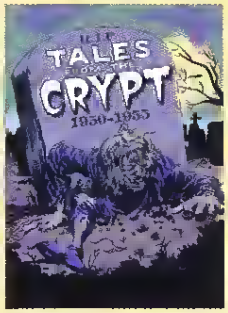
"One day I was in Al's office and there was a package of original art there, wrapped in brown paper," he remembers. "As I looked at it, I realized that the detail in the original drawings was considerably more than the cheap comic books were capable of reproducing. This led to my first venture as a publisher with *EC Portfolio One*, which featured large black and white reproductions of the art shot directly from these originals."

In 1978, Cochran took the next logical step and began work on *The Complete EC Library*. "I decided it would be better to try to republish all of the EC material instead of picking and choosing my

THE CRYPT REVAMPED

Just as a putrefied cadaver invariably clawed its way out the grave in the shocking conclusion of many of the original *Tales from the Crypt* stories, the enduring horror comic has been revived once again with a brand new look and feel by Papercutz, a relatively new graphic novel publisher with its sights set on the lucrative "tween" market.

"We're constantly looking for new titles to add to our line, and [Papercutz CEO] Terry Nantier would always mention to me how kids love scary stories. So, we decided to go after the rights for the greatest horror comic ever published," says Editor-in-Chief Jim Salicrup, who also illustrates the introductory pages with *Beavis and Butthead* artist Rick Parker. "To be able to publish an all-new *Tales from the Crypt* series is a dream – or maybe a nightmare – come true!"



This isn't the first time that *Tales from the Crypt* has been adapted for a younger audience. In 1993, a Saturday morning cartoon, *Tales from the Cryptkeeper*, was spun off from the popular HBO version of the show and shifted emphasis from graphic gore to fantastic situations. "*This* incarnation will focus more on morality tales, with a combination of dark humour and shock endings in the EC tradition," confirms Salicrup.

Introduced by the GhouLunatics and narrated by classic *Tales* characters The Crypt-Keeper, The Old Witch and The Vault Keeper, each 48-page issue of the revamped series will feature a pair of 20-page stories by a revolving cast of artists including Tim Smith III, Mr. Exes and Rick Parker, with covers by award-winning artist Kyle Baker. The debut issue opens with "For Serious Collectors Only,"(by Rob Vollmar and Smith III) a story about a toy collector obsessed with getting hold of an ultra-rare Japanese action figure, while a second issue tale, "The Tenant," promises a creepy fate for a slumlord who is forced to live in one of his own crumbling buildings.

While mainly designed to appeal to a new generation of horror comics fans, Papercutz still has long-time EC readers in mind with this new publication, which made its debut last month.

"Perhaps the biggest surprise to some cynical fans is that we'll actually listen to them. In fact, we're already considering some big changes based on early responses," reveals Salicrup. "We realize that creating new *Tales from the Crypt* stories is a big deal, and we're not taking that lightly. After all, John Carpenter, Stephen King and R.L. Stine all read this comic when they were kids, and it's safe to say it had a positive influence on them."

Paul Corupe



*EC's classic tale The High Cost of Dying (**The Haunt of Fear** #21, 1953) and (below) The Crypt Keeper rises again in the **Tales from the Crypt** television series.*

own favourites, as I had done in the *Portfolios*," he explains. Over the course of 28 years, he eventually reprinted every single EC issue in hardbound volumes from the black and white line art.

Although Gemstone Publishing acquired Russ Cochran Publishing in the mid-1990s, Cochran retained his title as publisher with Gemstone, and has now taken on the task of recreating the original colouring jobs with the new *Archives* editions of *Tales from the Crypt* and the other EC titles.

"I always wanted to reprint the EC stuff in colour," he explains. "But at the time, the technology was limited. For the *Archive* editions, each page is computer coloured, making sure to stick to the main themes of [EC colourist] Marie Severin's original hues, but with now-possible subtle touches."

In addition, Cochran has also sprinkled fascinating short articles and interviews throughout *The EC Archives: Tales from the Crypt*, as well as introductions by some of the comic's most famous fans – aside from Dante, filmmaker John Carpenter was featured in the first volume, published this past May.

Feldstein is equally excited about the new hardbound series. "From what I can see from carefully examining the first few published volumes, *The EC Archives* is going to be a full and thorough history of EC Comics, presenting the original artwork on machine-coated stock – a vast improvement over the original newsprint paper – using the latest modern technological reproduction techniques. It is going to be the ultimate tribute to the remarkably talented writers and artists who contributed to EC's original success, and were responsible for its phenomenal popularity."

Much of that continued popularity has to do with the film and television adaptations, which brought EC's trademark style to many viewers who would have never even considered reading the comics. In 1972, British studio Amicus Films made *Tales from the Crypt*, a horror anthology that featured five segments based on stories from the EC horror title, and starred venerable British stage actor Ralph Richardson as the Crypt Keeper, who tells five lost tourists, including Joan Collins and Peter Cushing, how they will die. A sequel, *The Vault of Horror*, was released the following year with five more spooky stories. In the 1980s, the George A. Romero/Stephen King project *Creepshow*, which featured poster artwork illustrated by Jack Kamen, was also highly influenced by EC Comics' shocking, gory style.

"As they aged into 'classic' comics, their influence was felt increasingly once the counterculture bloomed in the late '60s, which of course led to the various movie and television adaptations," Dante explains. "The Amicus films, beginning in 1964 with *Dr Terror's House of Horrors*, were deliberately EC-like and culminated in their biggest hit, *Tales from the Crypt*."

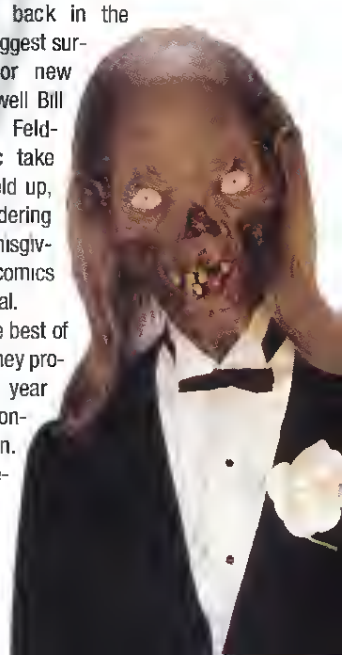
The franchise also got a huge boost from the 1989 HBO TV series *Tales from the Crypt*, again based on EC's sinister stories. "They captured the essence of the snap endings and the tongue-in-cheek approach that we did with all of our horror comics," Feldstein commented in 2000. "They captured our stuff pretty well and augmented it with modern cinematography and tricks. I was very pleased."

The show, hosted by a skeleton-like puppet Crypt Keeper voiced by John Kassir, was markedly different from Feldstein's original concept. Kassir's screechy-voiced Keeper has become a pop culture icon of his own, not only introducing two *Tales from the Crypt*-branded films, *Bordello of Blood* and *Demon Knight*, but even appearing in Saturday morning cartoons and his own holiday CD, *Have Yourself a Scary Little Christmas*.

"Horror sells, then and now," points out Dante. "Obviously the success of the 1972 movie revitalized the title, and then the HBO series kept it in the public eye for decades more. But nothing can become a classic if people can't see it, and this is where Russ Cochran and 'fan-addicts' like him come in. These throwaway comic books of nearly 60 years ago might have long ago turned to dust without the dedication and effort of those who realized their true value, and we all owe a debt of gratitude that the EC archive has been preserved so lovingly for future generations of fans."

Cochran clearly hopes to bring fans who have discovered *Tales from the Crypt* through its modern incarnations back to the original comics. These new colour reprints truly enhance the original ghastly imagery and stories that had many kids carefully hiding their lurid EC titles from snoopy parents back in the 1950s. But the biggest surprise waiting for new readers is how well Bill Gaines and Al Feldstein's prophetic take on horror has held up, especially considering Gaines' initial misgivings about the comics industry in general.

"They were the best of their genre and they provide enjoyment year after year," concludes Cochran. "They are timeless."



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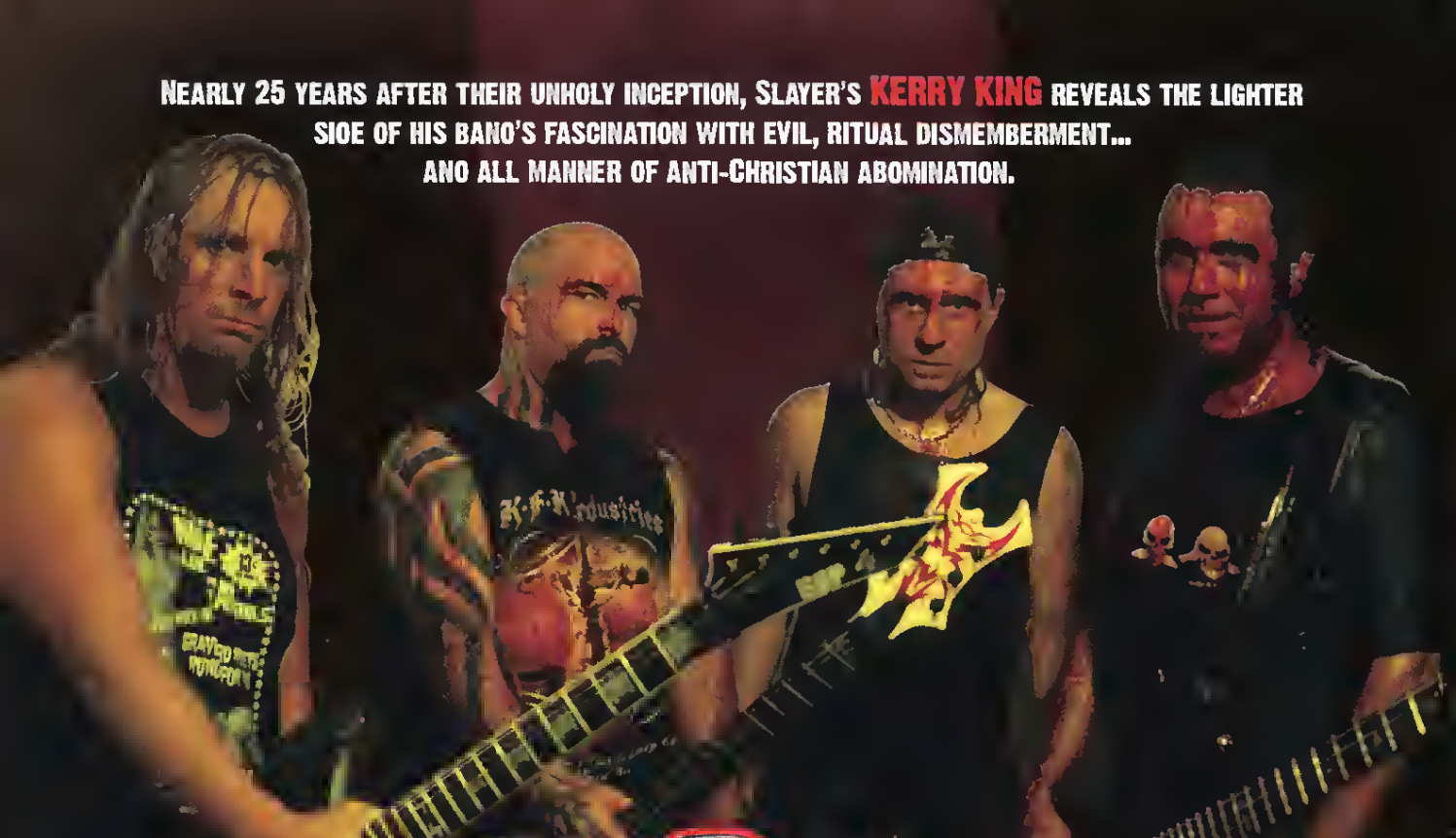


30TH ANNIVERSCARY

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NEARLY 25 YEARS AFTER THEIR UNHOLY INCEPTION, SLAYER'S **KERRY KING** REVEALS THE LIGHTER SIDE OF HIS BAND'S FASCINATION WITH EVIL, RITUAL DISMEMBERMENT... AND ALL MANNER OF ANTI-CHRISTIAN ABOMINATION.



SPILLING GUTS WITH SLAYER

BY JOVANKA VUCKOVIC

With lyrics that read like blood and bile, and a shredding sound that's like jagged razors to the ears, Slayer established themselves as "one of the most evil bands in history" by exploiting the worst of the worst. Pentagrams, inverted crucifixes, Nazi imagery, the torments of Hell, human sacrifice, serial killers, cannibalism, zombies, vampires, black magic and other blasphemies have become the rotten offerings in a brutal buffet of grinding thrash metal.

When the band came ripping and screaming out of Hell in 1983 with their overtly satanic self-financed debut, *Show No Mercy*, kids raised their devil horns in allegiance, while outraged parents prayed for their salvation.

More records followed, each with increasing interest in the unspeakable, including *Haunting the Chapel*, *Hell Awaits*, *Reign in Blood* (arguably the most influential metal album of all time), *South of Heaven*, *Seasons in the Abyss*, *God Hates Us All* and their latest, *Christ Illusion*. Their aggressive and antagonistic songs, which mine horror movies, the atrocities of war and an absolute hatred of Christianity, continue to court controversy despite the fact that countless death and black metal bands that followed in their footsteps have trumped them in terms of theatrics.

But theatrics are in fact what Slayer's all about. Unlike the dead serious, church-burning European black metal movement (progenitors Venom and Mercyful Fate among them), Slayer (Kerry King, Jeff Hanneman, Tom Araya and Dave Lombardo) has always understood the dynamic of controversy, provoking rather than preaching and never taking themselves too seriously. None of them are actually practicing Satanists, nor have they ever burned a church – that would be far too try-hard for a band like Slayer, who really has nothing to prove. And when they bathed themselves in blood for their Still Reigning tour banner a few years ago, the band was just doing what they do best: putting on a horror show and having several hundred gallons of fun doing it.

Slayer is currently touring with Marilyn Manson. Kerry King invites *Rue Morgue* backstage for a few beers, a few laughs and few honest remarks about "being evil."



I DON'T BELIEVE IN GOD SO I CAN'T BELIEVE IN SATAN... BUT SATAN SELLS.

KERRY KING

It's obvious that you draw influence from horror films when it comes to Slayer's image and lyrics. Tell me about how the two have come together over the years.

I like horror movies, that's my thing. Horror movies inspire me to write, same for [Jeff] Hanneman. Not Tom [Araya] though, 'cause he's a true crime kind of guy. But me and Hanneman are definitely into horror movies. I'm sure I derive ideas from some of them but I don't put it into songs in an obvious way, like "Hey, you got this from this movie." I might watch a movie and pick out some abstract line that touches me big time and think "I need to use that!"

***Like the backwards "Join Us" chant at the beginning of* Hell Awaits –**

Oh, that's TOTALLY from *The Evil Dead*! When I saw that movie, I was like eighteen, nineteen or younger, it was one of the movies I almost walked out of because I couldn't take it.

Really?

It became a horror-comedy franchise but back then it was so heavy. I was there with my then-girlfriend and I didn't tell her I was ready to leave but I was like, "Man, I can't take this!" [Laughs] Anyway I grew up and thought "Join Us" would be a great intro to our record.

Were there any other films that made you want to flee from the theatre screaming like a girl?

[Laughs] Yes! When I saw John Carpenter's *The Thing* in 1982 I was in the front row because that was the only seat available. ... Jesus, that was the most ridiculously crazy movie I had ever seen. To this day you watch *The Thing*, it's still scary as hell. If I had one movie on a desert island, *The Thing* would be it.

Slayer has always associated itself with satanic imagery without ever preaching a serious satanic message. What is your opinion of Satanism as a doctrine and why do you continue to exploit it as something scary and horrific?

Well it is scary and horrific to most people. But I mean, we're Slayer, we gotta write the shit people ain't gonna write. Myself, I'm an atheist, though. I say I don't believe in God so I can't believe in Satan. I'd be a hypocrite and I'd be ridiculous... but Satan sells. In the early days, we wrote more satanic stuff. Now we religion-bash more than anything else.

Why is that?

What I don't like about most organized religions is that they come knocking on your door trying to convert you. Satanists don't, atheists don't, we're not going to push it upon you. Christianity does that because they know there's so many holes in their "history," they're insecure about it. Dude, you don't come to my fucking house and try to



Ensemble of Evil: (left to right) Dave Lombardo, Kerry King, Jeff Hanneman and Tom Araya. .

teach me your religion, I don't give a shit. I hate that.

You've never met a Satanist that's tried to convert you?

No. Never. Or an atheist. That just doesn't happen. They believe what they believe and they're perfectly fine with it.



Nevertheless, with Slayer you're using Satanism to offend people on purpose.

[Laughs] Yeah! I enjoy writing stuff that makes people uneasy.

So it's a bit of a joke to you.

[Laughs] Well, yeah. It's all a big joke. We're just having fucking fun.

Slayer also has a history of appropriating Nazi imagery in an aggressive context. What is your interest in that period and do you feel any moral responsibility about exploiting it?

Number one: That's all Hanneman. Number two: No, I don't feel any responsibility, and he doesn't either. He's just into World War II. Our fathers fought in that war, but I don't have the same interest in it that he does. Like I walked on the bus today and he's watching some Adolf Hitler shit! [Laughs] He's a history buff. He's German, so maybe he's thinking all that shit through with Slayer.



A lot of the symbols you use come from the Nazis – the eagle...

The eagle definitely came from a Nazi symbol. Definitely. That is a Nazi symbol. Like the Nazis or hate 'em – most people hate 'em – they had some amazing imagery. And that eagle, we came up with that in 1990 and it's still here, it won't go away.

But what did it mean to you back then? Why use a symbol laden with so much hate?

I'll be honest, I don't know all the World War II shit that Jeff does, but to me, it just worked. We're Slayer, we're controversial, we want to be controversial and using something that mean just worked.

You didn't honestly think you could get away with that did you?

Here's an interesting story: in Europe, you know the "S" in Slayer? We couldn't have tips on it there because it looked too much like the "SS" letters. On German posters, the "S" was different, which changed the whole logo.

Why would you use that "S" in the first place?

Honestly, we thought we made it up.

Oh, bullshit.

No, really. I swear. It wasn't premeditated. Well... if Jeff had an agenda, maybe, but we were just a fledgling band that didn't know squat. I think it's just how it came out.

What was your inspiration for the song "The Antichrist" on Show No Mercy?

For the debut album of your career to have a song called "The Antichrist," that was fucking cool.

You went much darker thematically with Haunting the Chapel. What was the impetus for that?

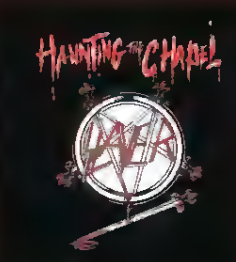
It wasn't deliberate; it was just evolution for us. We did that EP and that's what we knew. We bought Venom, we bought Mercyful Fate, so we thought we should do an EP. If we had done a full album with *Haunting the Chapel* it would have been the best album ever made because those three songs are fucking priceless. If we had done ten songs like that, no one would even give a shit about *Reign in Blood*.

Speaking of which, what do you remember most about recording Reign in Blood?

Not much. We were kids. Like I say to this day, those were the next ten songs. It wasn't like we went out of our way to make a great fucking record. They were the next ten. Simple as that.

Did you realize that the record you were about to release would redefine how hostile, evil and horrific a metal album could be? And whom do you credit its success to?

I have to credit Rick Rubin because it was Slayer's first major release. *Hell Awaits* is full of reverb, it's like Venom. But with Rick Rubin, he was like, "No man, clean that shit up and just slam it right into the forehead." And that's what *Reign in Blood* is. I guess people didn't know that music could be like that. You take the reverb out and it's like, "Holy shit." He influenced the sound, we didn't do anything different.



Though many years have passed, you continue to write songs about serial killers such as Ed Gein ("Dead Skin Mask") and Jeffrey Dahmer ("Room 213"), horror genre staples like vampires and zombies. Are these subjects as important to Slayer as the aggressiveness of the music?

I think they complement each other. Those things inspire us. We don't necessarily go out of our way to offend people, we just write about the things that interest us. Tom was into serial killers, that was his deal. It's so cool that he wrote those songs because it's something that neither Jeff or I would write about. So we have three lyricists that bring all sorts of dark interests into the music. I'm into the Satanist stuff, and some war stuff, which is generally Jeff, though. Religion bashing – that's all me. Like we talked about in the beginning, we're horror fans, we're into it.

"ONE OF THE GREATEST MONSTER MOVIES EVER MADE!"

– Logan Hill, *New York Magazine*



"ONE HELLUVA MONSTER MOVIE."

– Jim Emerson, *Chicago Sun-Times*

"A CLASSIC MOVIE MONSTER HAS BEEN UNLEASHED."

– Jeff Shannon, *Seattle Times*

"KNOCKOUT MONSTER MOVIE"

– Leah Rozen, *People*

"A TERRIFIC MONSTER MOVIE WITH HUMOR AND HEART."

– Dennis Dermody, *Paper*

A creature plunges from the Han River Bridge into the river emerging on its shores for a feeding frenzy upon onlookers. When a young girl is snatched in the melee, her family sets off to recover her from the monster that the government claims to be a host of an unidentified virus.



SPECIAL FEATURES

STANDARD DVD VERSION

- Deleted Scenes and Commentary with Director Bong Joon-Ho

COLLECTOR'S EDITION

- Deleted Scenes and Commentary with Director Bong Joon-Ho
- The Making of *The Host* with Director Bong Joon-Ho
- Designing the Creature
- Film Story Boards
- Puppet Animatronix
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- Special Effects and Sound Effects
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STEP INTO THE WITCH'S DUNGEON WAX MUSEUM, NORTH AMERICA'S LONGEST-RUNNING HALLOWEEN ATTRACTION.



HOUSE OF WAX

BY PAUL CORUPE

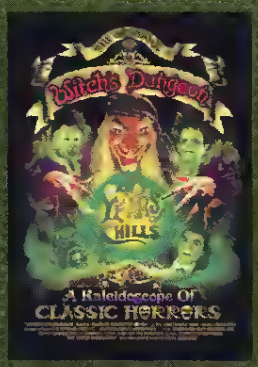
Presenting intricately detailed dioramas that range from the innovative silent thrills of 1925's *Phantom of the Opera* to the campy psychedelia of *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*, The Witch's Dungeon wax museum in Bristol, Connecticut is acknowledged as the longest-running Halloween attraction in America. Despite being open only on weekends in October, for four decades the Dungeon has been thrilling classic horror fans, many of whom line up for several hours just to spend a few minutes marvelling at the impressive figures created by museum founder Cortlandt Hull. Now, Hull and producer/director Dennis Vincent have created *The Witch's Dungeon: 40 Years of Chills*, a documentary that not only uncovers the history of the attraction, but is helping pave the way for its future.

Amazingly, Hull started the Witch's Dungeon when he was just thirteen-years-old. Nurturing an obsession with creature feature makeup that the small-scale Aurora monster models couldn't satisfy, he built his own life-size figure, an original character named Zenobia, the Gypsy Witch. From there, Hull hatched an idea to use his talents to create a tribute to the actors and craftsmen who brought these creatures to life on the silver screen.



"I talked it over with my dad, and he built a Swiss chalet-style building in our front yard specifically for it," explains Hull. "That was where the Witch's Dungeon all started."

As Hull added more and more figures to his "Dungeon," he studied techniques from the makeup artists and sculptors that still inspire him to this day. "Forrest J. Ackerman was the one who led the way. He introduced me to [make-up artists] Don Post Sr., Verne Langdon and John Chambers, and they were really instrumental in the early years."



Watching how Post and his creative team fashioned their famous movie monster masks had a direct influence on the evolution of the Witch's Dungeon's wax mannequins. "Originally, I used some of the Don Post masks, but they were foam-filled and unpainted. I did the paint job, and my mom helped me with the hairing. It was pretty crude to begin with, but I was only thirteen!"

Hull's figures have come a long way since their humble beginnings in the 1960s. Based on the actual life-casts of each actor and incorporating props and costumes used in the films, the current collection includes not only the entire stable of classic Universal monsters, but also Nosferatu, The Fly, Prof. Jarrod from *House of Wax* and even the Werewolf of London, as portrayed by Henry Hull -- Cortlandt's great uncle.

"One of the toughest ones was doing Bela Lugosi as Dracula," he notes. "There's a certain

way that Bela would fix his eyes on his victims, and if you didn't get that expression just right, it didn't look like Dracula. I did that head six times before I was happy with it."

The Witch's Dungeon has even attracted the attention of those he pays tribute to, including Vincent Price, who actually played an instrumental role in defending it. In 1992, Hull was sent a cease and desist order by Universal Studios' legal department that claimed his figures infringed on its trademarks.

"They wanted $10,000 per character," laughs Hull, who was charging $0.50 admission at the time (currently, he suggests a donation of $1.00). "It happened that Vincent called, and I told him what was going on. He said 'Let me talk to an Associated Press reporter about it.' Universal weren't happy about the bad publicity, especially coming from him, and it just snowballed from there."



Waxworks: The Fly, (inset) The Werewolf of London, (below) Vincent Price visits The Witch's Dungeon and (opposite) The Phantom of the Opera.

Since Hull wasn't actually making any money off his efforts, Universal eventually gave the museum permission to use their characters, and later even contracted Hull to create a figure of Lon Chaney Jr. as the Wolf Man for the Universal Studios Florida theme park. "I can laugh about it now, but I don't think it would have been resolved if Vincent hadn't come to my rescue," Hull says.

Though the Witch's Dungeon never was a profit-making venture, Universal's legal action prompted Hull to obtain non-profit status for the museum, which also allowed him to raise money to realize his dream of expanding the Witch's Dungeon into part of a new, larger year-round attraction called the Silver Screen Movie Museum & Archive.

"That's one of the reasons why Dennis came up with the idea to do the documentary," explains Hull. "He felt that if people could see that there's more to this than just the Witch's Dungeon, than just the figures, that it's really about the artistry of the movies, more interest could be generated."

To establish this, Dennis Vincent took the documentary beyond just a profile of the museum, to encompass a history of classic horror itself. He incorporated interviews from wide-ranging horror personalities such as Basil Gogos, Zacherley, Christopher Lee and collector extraordinaire Bob Burns, all of whom donated their time for the project. "We approached it as fans, and really allowed everyone to speak in-depth about their memories," explains Vincent. "There are no sound bites, and that's what sets our documentary apart – these people had the chance to really elaborate on their experiences."

The documentary also features interviews with horror legend descendants Sara Karloff, Bela Lugosi Jr. and Ron Chaney, all of whom Hull got to know over the years through their support of the museum. Vincent maintains that friendship with many of the participants was the real key to the film's success.

"With just Cortlandt and I there, it was like they were talking to old friends – which they were," he contends.

"That was a key factor with [makeup effects veteran] Dick Smith," agrees Hull. "He's a very private person and more or less refuses to do interviews. I almost hated to ask him, but he did finally agree to talk to us for fifteen minutes. Before it was over, he gave us a two-hour interview!"

Hull was equally pleased to have included an interview with June Foray, the well-known cartoon voice actress who provided the museum's voice track for Zenobia, as well as effects guru Tom Savini.

"It shows a different side of Tom that a lot of people don't realize, how knowledgeable he really is about classic horror," says Hull. "He actually told us that his dream project would be to remake *Man of a Thousand Faces* using Chaney's authentic makeup techniques."

All proceeds from the DVD, go towards the establishment of the Silver Screen Movie Museum & Archive.

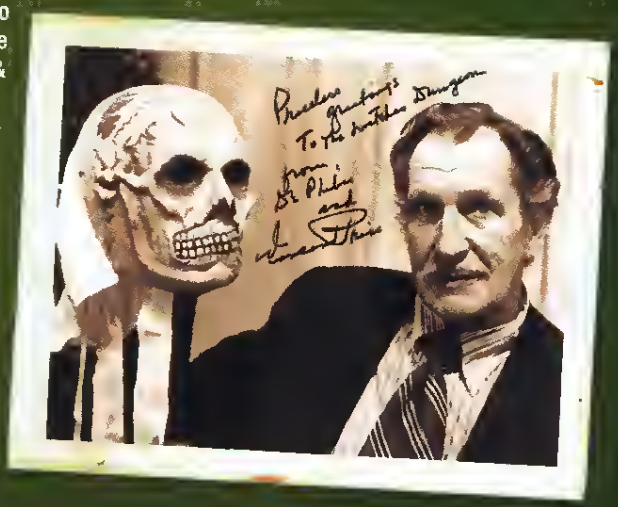
"Witch's Dungeon would definitely be a major part of it," explains Hull, "but we want to present every aspect of how movies are made, from set design, costumes, model work and animation – all the key aspects of the artistry of filmmaking."

He maintains that the biggest challenge facing the expanded museum is to find a city that wants to support it. "You really need the politicians to help you pave the way for grants. We have all the other ducks lined up – or vultures, if you prefer."

Hull is optimistic about the future of his museum, but ultimately he just wants to continue to pay homage to the artists and stars that fostered his fascination with monster movies when he was a kid.

"No matter what the outcome, I love doing what I do," he beams, adding that plans for a second documentary, tentatively titled *The Witch's Dungeon History of Classic Horror*, is already underway. "Unfortunately, so many of the studios have just discarded the rich material of makeup and props and models and background paintings. That's the reason we did the documentary – it's something we believe in, and there's still a lot of very important things that people can learn from this."

The Witch's Dungeon DVD is available through The Witch's Dungeon's website, preservehollywood.org.





Joshua: A new take on the evil offspring subgenre.

A PARENT'S WORST NIGHTMARE

JOSHUA

Starring Sam Rockwell, Vera Farmiga and Jacob Kogan
Directed by George Ratliff
Written by David Gilbert and George Ratliff
Fox

There is no shortage of fears to chip away at a parent's shaky hold on domestic bliss. Paedophiles, drug peddlers, rabid dogs and invisible microbes loom large in the troubled imaginations of mothers and fathers. But because children seem hardwired to love their often undeserving progenitors, few parents bother to ask themselves: what if my child doesn't love me? What if my child actually hates me and would do anything – anything – to be free of my love?

This is the arresting and fully realized premise of *Joshua*, a superb psychological thriller with Gothic overtones and plenty of clever nods to such child-centred horror classics as *The Omen*, *The Bad Seed*, *The Shining*, and *Rosemary's Baby*, the film it most resembles in tone and in its subtle layers of very black humour.

Sam Rockwell and Vera Farmiga turn in excellent performances as a Manhattan couple whose nine-year-old child prodigy, Joshua, takes a turn for the spooky after the arrival of his baby sister. Rockwell plays the father as an iPod-wearing hipster stockbroker who casually flips millions of dollars on his computer screen while his beautiful, high-strung wife makes another go as a perfect stay-at-home mother. Turns out that her first attempt – with Joshua – left her with a severe case of postpartum depression and a lot of very bad memories that the couple has agreed not to talk about. Things go well at first with the new baby, but neither parent notices Joshua's growing obsession with death, mummification and the eerie music of Hungarian composer Béla Bartók.

Joshua is at turns nasty, tense, funny and surreal, exploring and deconstructing the conventions of the demon child/bad seed genre without letting the viewer's sympathies slide into either Joshua or his parents' camp. Is Joshua a sociopath, as his father slowly begins to suspect, or is he an overly sensitive boy acting out his parents' – and society's – latent greed and selfishness? By refusing to answer that and many other questions, *Joshua* provides parents, teachers and casual onlookers with plenty to worry about.

James Grainger

HELLO, DOOM SERVICE?

1408

Starring John Cusack, Samuel L. Jackson and Mary McCormack
Directed by Mikael Håfström
Written by Scott Alexander, Matt Greenberg and Larry Karaszewski
Dimension

It's a fact that short stories almost always translate better to film than novels, which must be pared down to a feature-length running time. Given that Stephen King's simple shocker "1408" (from *Everything's Eventual*) was an effective chiller from the man who gave us what is arguably the ultimate haunted house story (*The Shining*), expectations were set high. With master thespians John Cusack and Samuel L. Jackson treading the floorboards of the world famous, haunted Dolphin Hotel and a script by the guys who brought us *Ed Wood*, one hoped *1408* would follow in the footsteps of *Stand by Me*, and steer clear of *The Lawnmower Man*.



Well, it isn't a wipeout, but it's hardly a transcendent experience, either. Cusack plays Mike Enslin, a hack writer who makes his living exposing haunted places for what they are in his world: a sham. He's now set his sights on The Dolphin's infamous room *1408* (you do the addition), location of decades of death and tragedy. Butting heads with weary hotel manager Olin (an underused Jackson), Enslin gets his wish – the place is haunted and it wants him to suffer.

There are some interesting ideas at play here; Enslin is a supernatural debunker, so his comeuppance in the very haunted room he's trapped in has a malicious irony to it – which would work if he was more likable. As it stands, he's saddled with the standard back story of a child lost to an incurable disease, which does, admittedly, provide some moving moments thanks to Cusack's balls-out performance. After all, what was the last mainstream movie to feature its protagonist trapped in a room going absolutely bonkers for pretty much the entire run-time?

The notion that ghosts are essentially our own fears, failures and pain manifested is intriguingly raised and one wishes it had received more play than it does here. However, with some genuinely surreal touches, effective suspense and Cusack's thespian chops, *1408* may not be as classy an accommodation as the Overlook Hotel, but it's still worth a visit.

Brad Abraham



Day Watch: *Yegor (Dima Martynov) faces the Dark Ones in this poignant follow-up to* ***Night Watch***

DAY DESTROYS THE NIGHT

DAY WATCH

Starring Konstantin Khabensky, Mariya Poroshina and Vladimir Menshov
Directed by Timur Bekmambetov
Written by Timur Bekmambetov and Alexander Talal
Fox Searchlight

The Russian blockbuster *Night Watch* rode into North America last year on a wave of hype. Based on the first in a series of apocalyptic fantasy novels by popular author Sergei Lukyanenko, it outgrossed the *Lord of the Rings* films in Russia and spawned a similarly successful sequel, *Day Watch*. Unfortunately, its mix of horror, sci-fi and fantasy, while visually impressive, was top-heavy with narrative, making it a confusing letdown.

Day Watch redeems the franchise. Summarizing the first film's endless back story in an efficient prologue, this sequel takes the series' core idea – the centuries-old truce between the forces of good and evil is threatened – and expands upon it with strong plotting, inventive visuals and real character development. It's so entertaining, in fact, that not only does it build anticipation for the proposed third film, *Dusk Watch*, but even makes revisiting *Night Watch* seem like a good idea.

Konstantin Khabensky returns as Anton, the Light Other whose adolescent son Yegor (Dima Martynov), a potential Great Other, decided to join the Dark Ones at the end of *Night Watch*. (These various Others consist of vampires, shape-shifters, sorcerers, witches and psychics.) Anton's new trainee is Svetlana (Mariya Poroshina), a Great Light Other whose psychic (and romantic) potential is immeasurable. Svetlana and Yegor, we are warned, must never meet or the world could end. Meanwhile, Zavulon (Viktor Verzhbitsky), the leader of the Dark Ones, incites war with the Light Others by framing Anton for the murder of two of his minions. Plus, there's the film's MacGuffin, Chalk of Fate, a literal piece of chalk whose possessor can rewrite his own history. Anton hopes to change his past, thus preventing the apocalypse the world is about to face. Got that? Good.



All this sounds needlessly complex, but *Day Watch* is a big story in which subplots are necessary, not contrived. Thankfully, director Timur Bekmambetov always maintains control. Freed from *Night Watch*'s burden of back story, he's able to convey the enormity of the plot by juxtaposing large-scale scenes of mayhem with intimate character moments. There are also wide swaths of humour and humanity which make the tragedy that much more poignant. *Dusk Watch*, here we come.

Sean Plummer

UNDER YOUR SKIN

BUG

Starring Ashley Judd, Michael Shannon and Harry Connick Jr.
Directed by William Friedkin
Written by Tracy Letts
Maple

All hail the return of William Friedkin. The director of one of the scariest movies ever made (*The Exorcist*), as well as one of the least scary movies ever made (*The Guardian*), returns triumphantly to horror with *Bug*, a sometimes unbearably intense adaptation of the Tracy Letts play about mental illness and twisted love.

A haggard Ashley Judd plays Agnes, a fragile waitress residing at a motel as rundown as she is. She lives in fear of her recently paroled ex, Jerry (Harry Connick Jr.), until she meets Peter (Michael Shannon), a hunky drifter whose problems surpass her own. Intensely lonely and damaged, these strangers find solace in each other's arms. And then the bugs arrive.

Peter spots them first. Agnes can't see them, but Peter insists they're there. Then he says they're in his blood, put there by army scientists during his tour in the Gulf. The bugs' egg sack, he claims, is hidden behind a bad tooth. It has to come out... and with the help of a pair of pliers, it does.

Blood flows in *Bug*, but the real horror comes when Agnes starts to share Peter's paranoid delusions. Sure, Jerry slaps Agnes around and the audience thinks, "What an asshole," but we soon realize that shy, misunderstood Peter is the real danger. He infects Agnes with his insanity, and their downward spiral is painful to watch.

Much praise goes to the leads. Judd pulls off dialogue that would be laughable if we did not believe she was Agnes, and Shannon, reprising his role from the play, is simply scary. Even a bulked-up Connick Jr. is perfectly cast

Continued on page 42

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THIS ONE'S FOR YOU, PETA

THE BLACK CAT

Starring Jeffrey Combs, Elyse Levesque and Enc Keenleyside
Directed by Stuart Gordon
Written by Dennis Paoli and Stuart Gordon
Anchor Bay



In the two mercurial seasons of *Masters of Horror*, the show has found an anchor in genre stalwart Stuart Gordon. His first contribution, "Dreams in the Witch-House," deftly adapted the work of Lovecraft, and this time the director successfully takes on a story based on the work of another icon: Edgar Allan Poe.

"The Black Cat" (1843), Poe's second psychological study of guilt and domestic violence (following "The Tell-Tale Heart"), offers a first-person account of what he described in the work as "a series of household events" that leads the narrator to madness and murder. Gordon and long-time screenwriting partner Dennis Paoli wisely weave the source material with resourceful nods to actual events and people in Poe's life, placing the writer in the role of the story's troubled narrator.

In the film, a worn-out Poe (Jeffrey Combs) struggles to put quill to paper to write another story after his publisher dismisses his poetry. Desperate to care for his wife Virginia (the stunning Elyse Levesque), who's stricken with consumption (now known as tuberculosis), he sits down at a blank page. Of course, Poe's a victim of another kind of consumption, alcohol, which invokes a perverse side to his nature, along with hallucinations that centre on his cat Pluto, whom he believes has ill will toward him.

PETA members will be appalled by the episode, which has Poe destroy the cat many times during his journey over the edge. Combs' turns in a tremendous performance in the moody, Gothic black and white film, which perfectly captures the essence of the tortured writer, right down to his slight Virginia accent. By casting Poe himself as the unfortunate narrator of "The Black Cat," the episode offers a glimpse into what his distressed life might have been like. An excellent contrivance, and the best episode of the series by far.

Jovanka Vuckovic



Bug: *Peter (Michael Shannon) performs some self-dentistry.*

as the menacing yet charming Jerry.

Letts' script is heavy on dialogue, light on action, but sound designer Steve Boeddeker (*The Exorcist* re-release) adds gut-wrenching punch to the violence when it does come. And Friedkin makes good use of the cramped motel room location to amp up the claustrophobia.

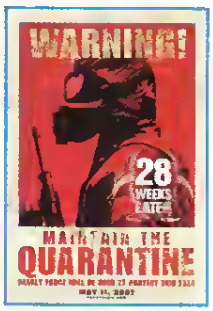
Opening as it did against *Pirates of the Caribbean. At World's End*, you likely didn't see this one, but seek out *Bug*. You'll be immediately infected.

Sean Plummer

RAGING ON

28 WEEKS LATER

Starring Robert Carlyle, Emily Beecham and Imogen Poots
Directed by Juan Carlos Fresnadillo
Written by Rowan Joffe, Juan Carlos Fresnadillo and Jesús Olmo
Fox Atomic

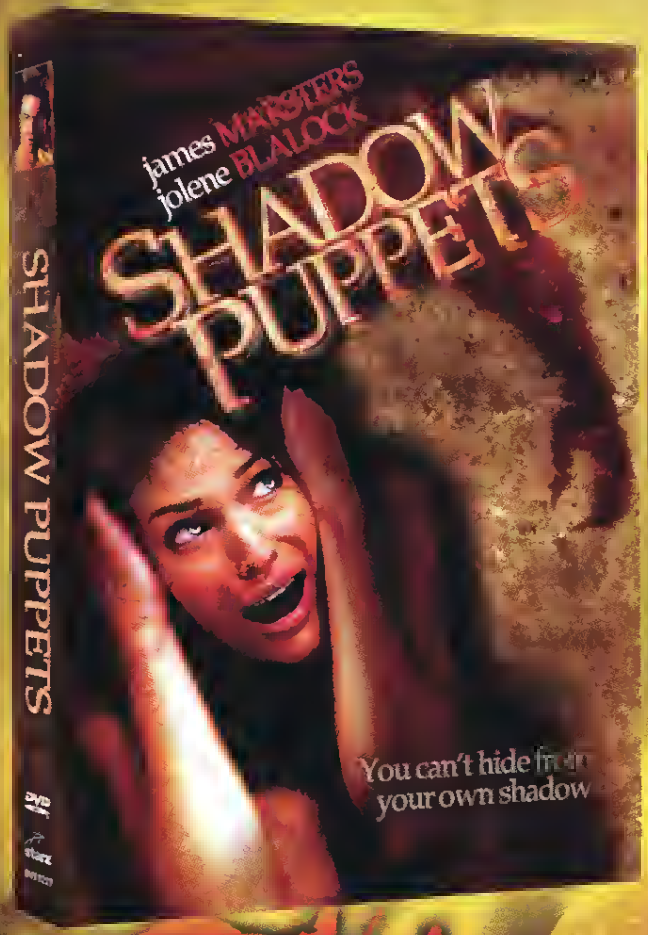


28 Weeks Later can be summed up in three words: fun but dumb. A description that pits it in that dodgy nowhere land between guilty pleasure and decent genre entertainment.

Set 28 weeks after the Rage virus outbreak that annihilated Britain (as seen in *28 Days Later*), the film sees the US Army now in London running the clean-up and repopulation efforts, believing the virus died off when the last of the infected starved to death. Robert Carlyle (*Trainspotting*) plays Don, a guilt-wracked civilian infrastructure worker in the repopulated zone who, months earlier, abandoned his wife while escaping the infected. When his kids return to the country and sneak out of the safe zone to visit the family home, they unwittingly reintroduce the virus. As full-blown Rage breaks out, a sympathetic soldier, along with a



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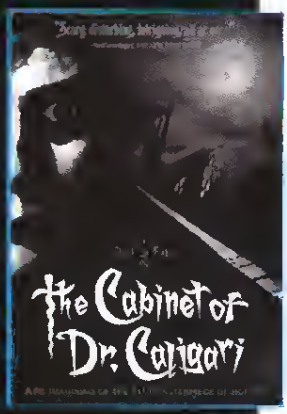
THE SONAMBULIST RETURNS

THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI

Starring Doug Jones, Daamen J. Krall
and Judson Pearce Morgan
Written and directed by David Lee Fisher
Image Entertainment

Call it an extended remix or a monster mash-up, but David Lee Fisher's bizarre re-imagining of the seminal German Expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* is anything but lacking in originality. For his sort-of remake, Fisher scanned a print of the original *Caligari* and extracted digital images of the movie's surreal sets. He then filmed actors in period costume and pancake makeup performing an updated version of the film's dream-like storyline in front of green screens, which were then filled in during post-production with the digitized scans.

The biggest change is the inclusion of spoken dialogue, which allows Fisher to flesh out the relationships between Francis, a young accountant, his best friend Alan, a manic-depressive poet, and the woman they are both in love with, Jane. Alan convinces his workaholic friend to attend a fair with him, where they witness an exhibition of the prophetic powers of ghoulish somnambulist Cesare, who's under the "treatment" of the power-mad Dr. Caligari. When Cesare correctly predicts Alan's untimely death the next morning, Francis finds himself drawn into a shadowy maze of murder, hallucination and hypnotism.



The early, dialogue-heavy scenes between Francis and Alan are interesting in themselves but they occasionally undermine the film's surreal tone, which replicates the feeling of a nightmare you cannot wake from. Alan's analysis of his own fractured mental state also sounds straight out of a contemporary medical journal, contradicting the film's early 20th-century setting. Otherwise, Fisher's update retains much of the original film's power while filling in a few of its darker corners. Especially fun to watch is *Hellboy*'s Doug Jones as the sleepwalking Cesare and Daamen J. Krall chewing digital scenery as the maniacal Caligari. And by giving Caligari's victims more back story and voices to articulate their fears, Fisher makes their descent into insanity that much easier to imagine.

James Grainger

scientist who believes the cure may lie with the kids take on the responsibility of helping the pair escape. On the run in ruined London, they must dodge both the infected and the military, which has decided to take extreme measures to contain the outbreak.

Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, whose Spanish-language short *Esposados* was nominated for an Oscar, takes over directorial duties from *28 Days Later*'s Danny Boyle, who serves here as an executive producer. Fresnadillo's vision brings a more frenetic feel to the franchise, with action sequences accentuated by quick cuts and shaky camera footage.

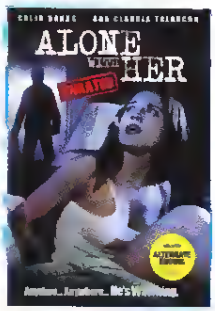
As such, *28 Weeks Later* delivers fast-paced, flesh-ripping action, but it's not quite enough to make up for the plot-hole-o-rama that comes before it. For instance, if the military had a carrier of a deadly disease in quarantine, would they leave the room unguarded? Of course not. Nor would they stuff civilians in a pitifully unsecured basement in the event of another outbreak. And lastly, if the infected are still supposed to be living humans, and not zombies, how can they keep running after being partially eviscerated? The characters are similarly haphazard in their construction, which is unfortunate because the film has no qualms about killing off those who you'd least expect. Still, despite these flaws, it never drags and delivers gore in all the right places, which is definitely entertaining – but only if you can turn your brain off for an hour-and-a-half.

Monica S. Kuebler

BEDROOM EYES

ALONE WITH HER

Starring Colin Hanks, Ana Claudia Talancón
and Jordana Spiro
Written and directed by Eric Nicholas
Genius Products



There's low budget, no budget and then there's *Alone with Her*, a new thriller that looks like it could have been funded by cashing in the rewards points of writer/director Eric Nicholas' Sears card. Nicholas takes the *Blair Witch* digital-cinema verité aesthetic as far as it can possibly go while keeping his plot within the limits of plausibility, and, amazingly, the results make for an intriguing, creepy little film.

This success owes largely to the movie's clever central conceit and the performance of star Colin Hanks (yes, son of Hollywood titan Tom), who plays Doug, a disturbed computer geek who gets a serious crush on Amy (Ana Claudia Talancón), a babe he spots in the park one day. Sensing that she won't be won over by his pocket protector and *God of War* high score, Doug breaks into her apartment, installs security cameras and returns home to study his beloved's every move on his computer screen. The movie purports to be the digital record of Doug's twisted, high-tech courting ritual, in which he uses the multiple cameras' raw data (including the names of favourite bands and movies) to turn himself into Amy's ideal lover.

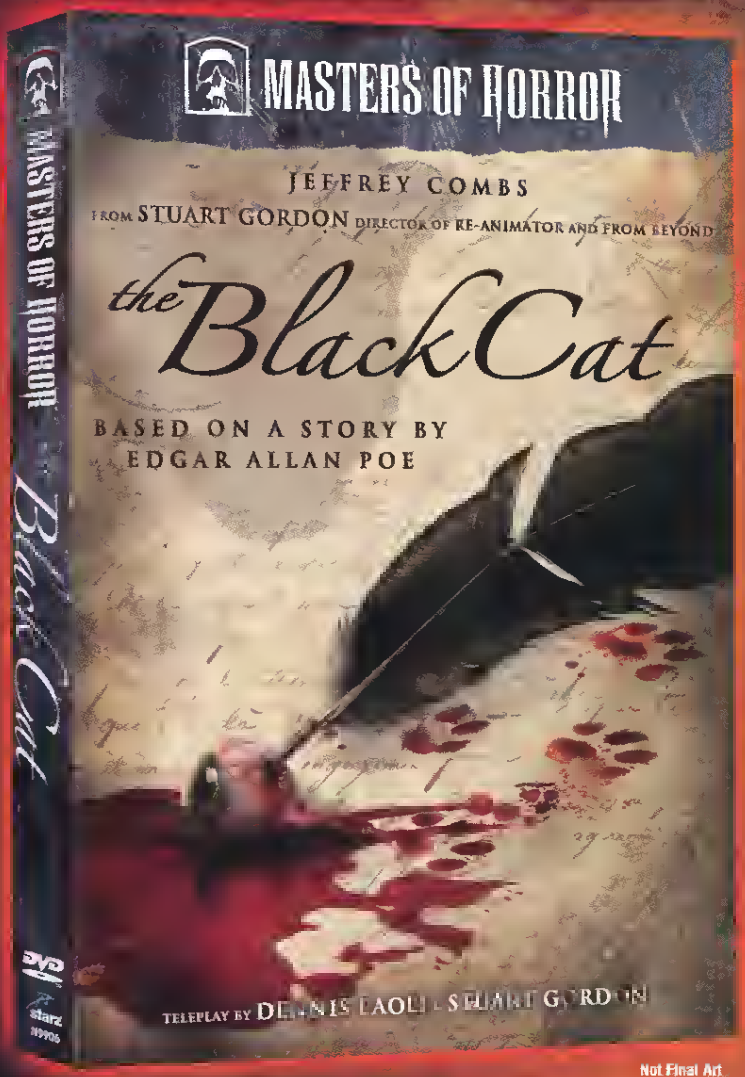
Hanks plays Doug as a pathetic but strangely well-intentioned loner whose tenuous hold on reality unravels when Amy proves resistant to his charms. Even after he sabotages her personal life so that he can swoop in and pick up the pieces – a destructive campaign that includes mildly poisoning her to ward off the advances of a hot suitor and kidnapping her beloved dog – it's hard not to root for him; after all, he just wants to be loved. Hanks' sympathetic performance makes Doug's inevitable transformation into a murderous control freak all the more compelling and scary.

Alone With Her may feel at times like a character study of two lonely people, one looking for a companion, the other for a total rebirth into a new identity, but there is still enough suspense and downright nastiness here for psycho-killer fans. It may also inspire a few budding filmmakers to apply for that line of credit.

James Grainger

"A GRISLY BUT GORGEOUS GOTHIC TALE OF TERROR."

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OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE RISES TO THE OCCASION

NIGHT OF THE LIVING PORN STARS



SWAMP ZOMBIES

Brain Damage Films

In what is a boost to the medical profession, a hospital experimenting with a reanimation serum dumps test corpses in a lake, creating an army of zombies who attack a group of college students doing an ecological survey in a nearby swamp. Nothing new here, yet *Swamp Zombies* entertains with gory special effects, lots of titular ghouls, an impressive body count and the even more impressive body of porn queen Jasmin St. Claire (*Naked Horror*), whose bad acting can be forgiven thanks to her prolonged shower scenes. Thankfully, more T&A, and some multitudinous gore overcome additional pathetic acting, ridiculously staged martial arts and a soundtrack that often drowns out the dialogue. Even UFC veteran Dan "The Beast" Severn shows up to kick zombie ass, which is worth the rental price alone.

Body Count: 53
Zombie Count: 29

DO YOU WANNA PAR-TAY?



ZOMBIES GONE WILD

Westlake Entertainment Inc.

Some movies are so bad they should have a health warning, and *Zombies Gone Wild* is one of 'em. It centres around three puke-stained losers on a spring break road trip who spend most of the movie farting, shitting and trying to score. Along the way they encounter zombie sluts, who lure them to their compound with the promise of a good time, but plan to feast on them instead. The entire movie is a deplorable T&A-free mess, plagued by lame acting, horrible camera work, an annoying soundtrack and lacklustre zombies that don't appear for over an hour. The best thing here is an extra where a bartender demonstrates a variety of zombie drinks, which you'll need if you plan to watch this.

Body Count: 6
Zombie Count: 16

SAY GOODNIGHT, GRUESOME



ZOMBIE NIGHT

Maverick Home Entertainment

Zombie Night is one of those movies genre fans love to hate for all the wrong reasons. Canadian filmmaker David J. Francis offers up a slight twist on the formula, pitting his apocalypse survivors against flesh-munchers who only come out at night. This focuses the action on the humans, who are not only forced to fight the walking dead but must struggle with each other over leadership and the limited amount of food, water and ammunition. Yes, this is an obvious homage to the Romero films and, yes, it was filmed on a micro-budget and has plenty of shortcomings, but it's also an imaginative, gruesome film that has its heart in the right place: between the teeth of a maggot-spewing zombie.

Body Count: 49
Zombie Count: 74

Last Chance Lance

FANTASTIC FRAME-JOB

BLOOD TEA & RED STRING

Written and directed by Christiane Cegavske
Cinema Epoch



It took Christiane Cegavske an astonishing thirteen years to delicately craft this stop-motion animated extravaganza. And while that seems like an eternity (especially considering its scant running time of 69 minutes), by crunching the numbers, we can see what a difficult task that actually is. Every second of stop-motion animation equals 24 separate frames, therefore, with a running time of 69 minutes, *Blood Tea & Red String* contains a staggering 99,360 frames of (dialogue-free) film. Assuming that over the thirteen years Cegavske put in a 40-hour week – with two weeks off each year for good behaviour – that's about 26,000 hours of work, and a mere 3.8 frames per hour.

But what is Cegavske's meticulously modelled magnum opus all about, anyway? Well, it details the plight of the Creatures Who Dwell Under the Oak, happy-go-lucky bird-beaked rodents commissioned to create a love doll for a gang of decadent white mice. The Creatures fall in love with their creation and refuse to hand over the goods, though, instead choosing to string her up on an oak tree whilst passing the hours fiddling on a flute. Not ones to take no for an answer, the spurned mice return on a tortoise-drawn carriage and abscond with the coveted doll. Devastated to learn that their beloved mascot has been swiped, the Creatures embark upon a Pygmalionesque quest that sets them against such oddities as body-snatching plant pods, giant spiders, mystical toad kings and fruit capable of inducing mind-bending states of delirium (not that this film isn't already tripped out enough, though).

And while it doesn't necessarily traverse new territories of the imagination, *Blood Tea & Red String*'s 99,360 individually photographed frames firmly establish Cegavske as an artist thoroughly dedicated to the pursuit of personal cinema and one who's intuitively attuned to the familiar fairy tale worlds mapped out by the likes of Tolkien, Carroll and Potter (Beatrix, that is. Not Harry).

Stuart Andrews


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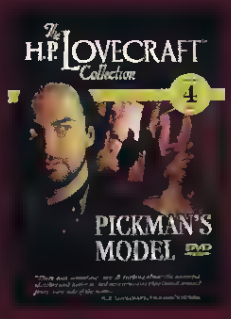
LURKER FILMS, a company specializing in collecting shorts based on the work of The Dark Prince of Providence, releases the fourth DVD in their H.P. Lovecraft Collection.

WEIRD TALES, STRANGE FILMS

by James Grainger

Though he may not look like one of the obsessive madmen who haunt the tales of Edgar Allan Poe and H.P. Lovecraft, Andrew Migliore, the ex-software engineer who founded The H.P. Lovecraft Film Festival, has much in common with those doomed dreamers. Like many a Poe and Lovecraft narrator, Migliore has brought a single-mindedness of purpose and a love of macabre and arcane tales to his mission to track down and screen for the general public short and full-length films based on the works of Lovecraft and other pioneers of the weird tale such as Poe and Robert W. Chambers.

Migliore and his staff have been screening films based on (or influenced by) the works of these distinctly literary authors at the Lovecraft Film Festival since 1995, making Portland, Oregon – on October's Columbus Day long weekend – a must-visit stopover on the horror festival circuit. But Migliore, who also co-wrote the excellent guide to Lovecraftian cinema, *Lurker in the Lobby* (*RM#50*), has been busy with an even more ambitious project, Lurker Films, a company he founded in 2004 to produce and distribute compilations of short films and audio recordings celebrating the work of the same authors highlighted in the Festival.



To date, Lurker Films has released six compilations of short films on DVD, the latest of which is the fourth in The H.P. Lovecraft Collection. *Pickman's Model*, named after one of the Dark Prince of Providence's better known stories (published in 1927), contains three distinct cinematic takes on the tale of a demented but brilliant artist (Pickman) who draws a naive art lover into his twisted world.

The most ambitious and successful of the three films, *Chilean Gothic*, was produced for Chilean TV after its writer, Gilberto Villarroel, won a scriptwriting contest for his adaptation of "Pickman's Model." Villarroel and director Ricardo Harrington transfer the setting to modern Chile and flesh out the story (a necessity for anyone adapting Lovecraft's work, since so little actually happens in his tales), by adding a subplot about a journalist who is savagely murdered and mutilated while researching a magazine article on an American artist named Pickman, whose obscene but highly realistic paintings have shocked the art world. Another journalist picks up the trail and tracks down the crazed artist, only to discover that his paintings of human-monster couplings are based on real models. The film exploits the imposing stone buildings and alleyways of Santiago, Chile to recreate Lovecraft's brooding, atmospheric prose, and as in the best of Lovecraft's work, the worst horrors are left to be filled in by the viewer's imagination.

The other two adaptations are also both worth watching, though neither achieves the gloomy intensity of *Chilean Gothic*. Giovanni Furore's Italian take on the tale remains a little too true to Lovecraft's motto of "atmosphere, not action," relying on too many shots of characters discussing the horror of Pickman's work and looking away from the canvasses when they are uncovered. The ending is quite effective, though, and the production values and settings are first-rate.

Setting the author's work in yet another locale, Cathy Welch's black and white 1981 *Pickman* was filmed in Texas and is the only version to embrace the pulpy core of Lovecraft's best offerings. Looking like an EC comic come to life, the film achieves moments of campy humour and unnerving horror, often in the same scene.

The DVD is rounded out with two very short films, a computer-animated version of "In the Vault" and a Lynchesque celluloid riddle based loosely on "Between the Stars."

For Poe fans, Lurker Films has also released the first in a planned compilation series of Edgar Allan Poe shorts. The centrepiece of *Annabel Lee & Other Tales of Mystery and Imagination* is George Higham's stunning stop-motion puppet animation re-imagining of the titular poem of doomed love. As a narrator reads the haunting poem, an amazingly expressive puppet version of Poe wanders through a hellish landscape that is one part goth nightclub and one part German Expressionist film set. This disc also contains two shorts, a Spanish version of "The Tell-Tale Heart" featuring a typically first-rate performance by the great Paul Naschy and a rather sophomoric version of "The Raven" that looks a little too much like a student film project.

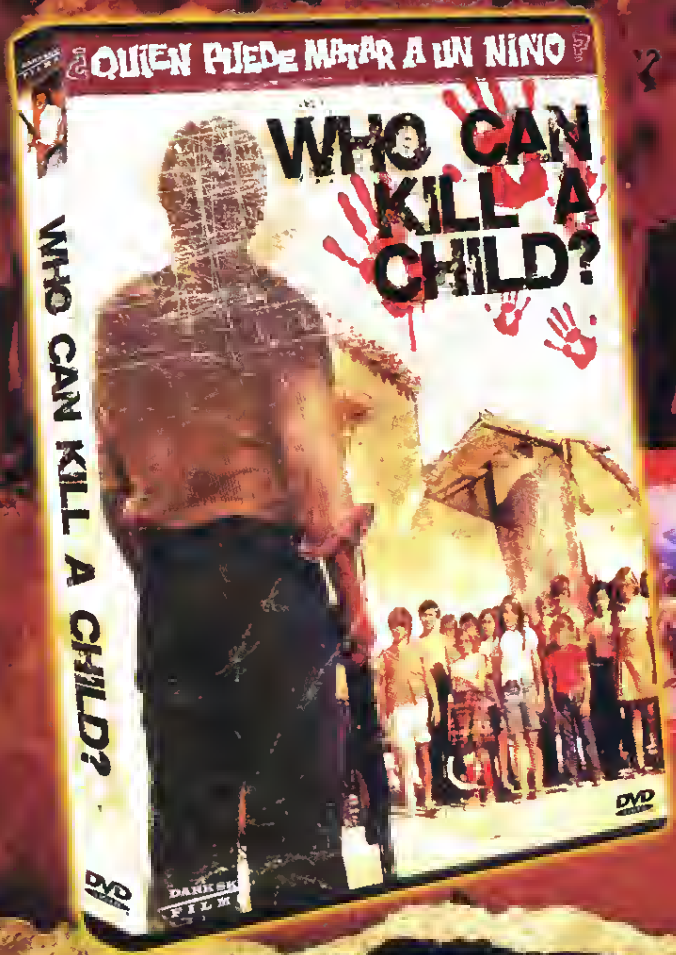
As with all of Lurker Films' DVDs, both collections contain plenty of supplementary material on the films and background information on the greats of horror lit celebrated onscreen.



Short Cuts: *(above)* ***Chilean Gothic*** *and* ***Annabel Lee & Other Tales of Mystery and Imagination.***

WHO CAN KILL A CHILD?

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On a vacation away from their family, Tom (Lewis Fiander, of DR. JEKYLL & SISTER HYDE) and his pregnant wife Evelyn (FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD's Prunella Ransome) sail to an island off the coast of Spain that seems deserted... until its children emerge from the shadows with the blood of their parents on their hands... and hatred in their hearts for every adult.



"A masterwork of the Spanish horror cinema."
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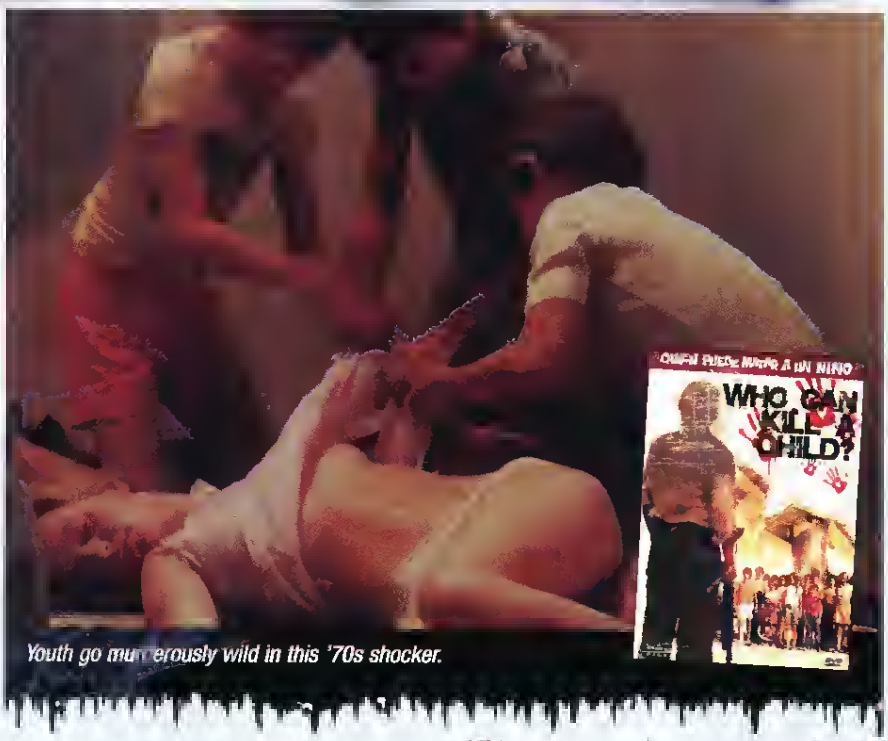
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REISSUES



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MOMMY'S LITTLE MONSTERS

WHO CAN KILL A CHILD? (1976)

Starring Lewis Fiander, Prunella Ransome and Javier De La Camara
Written and directed by Narciso Ibáñez Serrador
Dark Sky Films

With a plaintive title and a harrowing seven-minute opening credit sequence culled from documentary footage of the worst cataclysmal conflicts of the 20th century (narrated by the same voice actor who provided English dub tracks for Paul Naschy), *Who Can Kill a Child?* is the most heart-wrenching, scathing anti-war parable in the genre.

British couple Tom (Lewis Fiander) and his pregnant wife Evelyn (Punella Ransome) are on a kid-free holiday in Spain before the birth of their third child. After a four-hour trip in a rented boat, they putter into a small fishing village and find it all but deserted, save for some local children. Tom and Evelyn move through the village to discover all the adults brutally murdered. When Tom witnesses a young girl beating an old man to death with his cane and a group of children using his corpse as a macabre piñata, it's apparent the children are responsible – and that their murderous rampage isn't over.

Who Can Kill a Child? is siege horror influenced in no small part by *Night of the Living Dead*. Instead of reanimated corpses, however, the threat comes in the form of these doe-eyed homicidal kids. The emotional power of this film lays in the moral dilemma Tom and Evelyn face – do they kill to live? "They're children, they're just little children!"

Unlike the aforementioned zombie film, this movie takes place almost entirely in the blazing light of day. The violence is sparse but chilling, effective and unexplained, just as there is no reason behind the continued deaths of children in Afghanistan, Iraq or Darfur today. The message in this film is simple: every generation kills the next, who grow up to repeat the sins of their fathers. Except this generation hasn't grown up…

Dark Sky presents an excellent anamorphic 1.85:1 print of this underrated and woefully relevant Euro-cult film with English and subtitled Spanish-language options. Extras include a nine-minute interview with director Narciso Ibáñez Serrador and a sixteen-minute interview with cinematographer José Luis Alcaine. Get it and get depressed.

The Gore-met

JUST PLAIN CRAZY

THE BLIND WOMAN'S CURSE (1970)

Starring Meiko Kaji, Toru Abe and Tatsumi Hijikata
Directed by Teruo Ishii
Written by Teruo Ishii and Chusei Sone
Discotek



It's been noted in these pages before: late Japanese schlockmeister Teruo Ishii (*Female Yakuza Tale*, *The Horror of Malformed Men*) churned out some of the most delirious genre films around. For proof, look no further than *The Blind Woman's Curse*, a film even the notoriously slapdash Ishii himself admitted was nonsensical.

Japan has a great tradition of "nonsense fiction," usually going hand in hand with the erotic and the grotesque. Teruo Ishii could concoct this heady brew like no other filmmaker before or since, applying himself with a zeal that recalls the best of Jess Franco and Herschell Gordon Lewis and a sense of style that rivals Mario Bava and Terence Fisher.

The Blind Woman's Curse is a bizarre potpourri of ghost story, yakuza movie and eroguro grotesquery. Somewhere at its centre, though hardly keeping everything together, stands 1970s action icon Meiko Kaji as Akemi, the dragon tattoo-wearing head of her late father's yakuza gang. In a rousing opening credit sequence we see Akemi and her gang attack a rival mob in a rainswept, slow-motion sword battle. She accidentally slashes the boss' younger sister across the eyes, after which a black cat appears out of nowhere to lap up the blood.

Following a three-year stint in jail, Akemi returns to take command of the gang. Not a moment too soon as there's a traitor in their midst, and Akemi's elite force of sexy swordswomen are turning up dead with their dragon tattoos cut off. Latter handiwork is courtesy of the young woman from the opening scene, who has returned with a thirst for vengeance. Working as a blind knife thrower in a travelling sideshow, she's assisted in her vendetta by a manic bunchback and the cat that once drank her blood and now wants a taste of Akemi's red stuff.

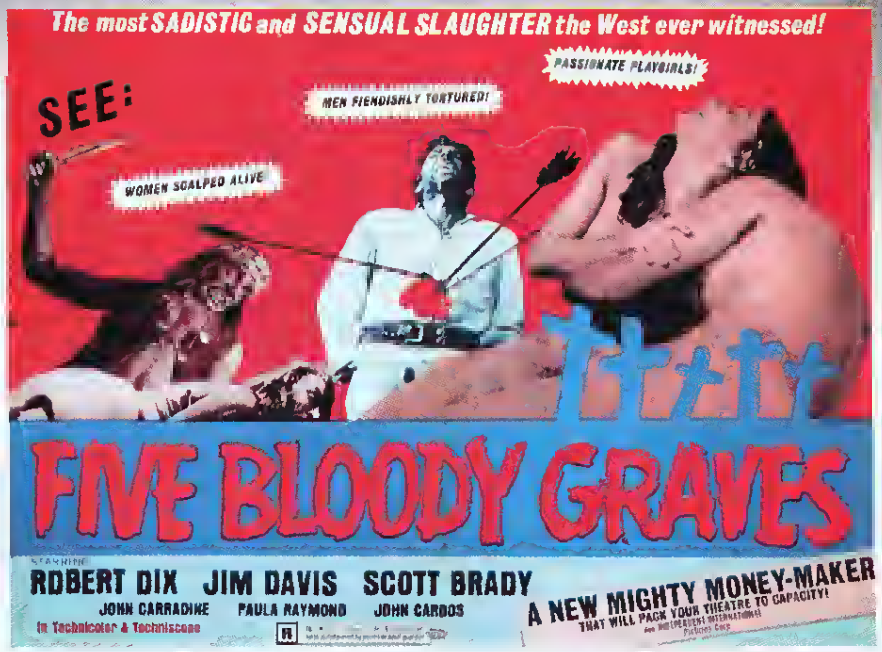
No plot synopsis can do justice to the deranged spectacle that is *The Blind Woman's Curse*. Taking place in one gaudily coloured set piece after another, it features plenty of ultra-violent sword fights, culminating in a final confrontation between Akemi and her blind nemesis that unfolds against a phantasmagorical backdrop of spiralling clouds while the black cat looks on. Crazy is the word.

Tom Mes

ADAMSON APLENTY

FIVE BLOODY GRAVES (1970)
NURSE SHERRI (1978)

Directed by Al Adamson
Written by Robert Dix, Michael Bockman and Gregg Tittinger
Retro Shock-O-Rama



Al Adamson was one of the greatest sleaze directors that you probably haven't heard of. Renowned for his ability to slap together movies on a shoestring budget, his career was cut short in 1995 when he was murdered by his home renovator. Adamson's prolific output featured delicious cult titles like *Horror of the Blood Monsters*, *Brain of Blood* and *Blood of Dracula's Castle*, but his big "hit" was Lon Chaney Jr.'s last film, the 1971 cheese-fest *Dracula vs. Frankenstein*.



Nurse Sherri, one of two features on Retro Shock-O-Rama's double-disc Adamson set, is one of the filmmaker's better-known movies. Written by Michael Bockman and Gregg Tittinger (from an idea by Adamson), it features Jill Jacobson in the role of Sherri, a nurse possessed by the evil spirit of an enigmatic cult leader who uses her well-proportioned body to seek revenge on his enemies.

Although dated, it's a thoroughly enjoyable watch rife with car chases, explosions and lots of gore – not to mention, some of the worst special effects ever committed to celluloid. You might also want to check out the better alternate cut (also included), which features some additional sex and violence.

Five Bloody Graves, on the other hand, was Adamson's answer to the popular spaghetti westerns. Although the film has a crazy '60s rock soundtrack, Robert Dix's script has plenty of gunfights, wagon trains, Indian ambushes, scalpings and chorus girl catfights. Even B-movie staple John Carradine makes an appearance as a perverted preacher.

It also happens to be narrated by the pale rider himself: Death. Voiced by Gene Raymond, Death explains how cowboy Ben Thompson (Dix again, who was also the producer) is hunting down the renegade Indian chief who murdered his wife. The bleak narration is the scariest part of this campy but enjoyable film, as it explains that we're all pawns in the game of life and must serve death in the end.

Retro Shock-O-Rama has packaged both movies with great vintage trailers, intermission ads, a commentary track with producer Sam Sherman and an interview with *Nurse Sherri* co-star Marilyn Joi, offering fantastic insight into the canon of a late, great B-movie master.

Last Chance Lance

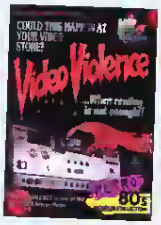
BE KIND, REWIND!

VIDEO VIOLENCE... WHEN RENTING IS NOT ENOUGH (1987)

Starring Art Neill, Jackie Neill and William Toddie
Directed by Gary Cohen
Written by Gary Cohen and Paul Kaye
Camp Motion Pictures

The first round of releases from Camp Motion Pictures didn't convince me that "the awesome '80s are back!," and I was doubtful that this title would make me see the light. But I had an epiphany at the eight-minute mark. The ice around my heart melted when the opening credit sequence ended at.. the doors of a mom-and-pop video store! I believe in Camp! Praise JVC!

Video Violence... Renting is Not Enough is an early shot-on-video classick best described as *2000 Maniacs!* meets *Bloodsucking Freaks*. Steve (Art Neill) is a disillusioned New York theatre owner who moves to the town of Dogpatch to run his own video store. All of the locals are members and only rent horror films. When a mysterious tape chronicling the murder of the postmaster is returned to his store and his lone employee disappears, Steve skirts the skeptical police chief and starts an investigation that leads to a local snuff film ring.



This film has it all: boobs, blood and big-box VHS tapes! The performances are arch, the gore endearingly cheapjack (especially a hilarious beheading and a severed arm run through a deli meat slicer!) and the women who doff their tops are pleasantly stacked. But more importantly, this is a time capsule of '80s video store culture. I wept with joy at the shots of racks of oversized clamshell cases in the store's horror section – there's even a mint Wizard Video big box of *Wizard of Gore*! Keep an eye out for video release posters that include *April Fool's Day* and *Critters*. *Video Violence* is a snapshot of my youth; the villains even drink the same beer I did in 1987!

Excellent extras include the sequel, *Video Violence 2* (1987), which is gorier but not as much fun as the original, commentary tracks for both films, a fourteen-minute interview with the director and trailers for all the Camp Video releases. Be kind, rewind!

The Gore-met



ASLEEP AT THE GRINDHOUSE

BY JOHN W. BOWEN

IN THE WAKE OF GRINDHOUSE, REISSUE COMPANIES ARE REVIVING THE SKANKY DELIGHTS OF 42ND STREET. THIS MONTH DEIMOS CHALLENGES YOU TO SIT THROUGH A PAIR OF DOUBLE BILLS WITH THE FIRST TWO RELEASES IN ITS WELCOME TO THE GRINDHOUSE SERIES.



THE TEACHER AND PICK-UP

Directed by Howard Avedis and Bennie Hirschenson

Back in our grindhouse retrospective (*RM#66*), Bill Lustig – an aficionado of the milieu if ever there was one – stated, "Ninety-nine percent of the films that were promoted never delivered on what they were promoting." The director of *Maniac* and president of Blue Underground has a valid point when it comes to both features on Deimos Entertainment's first *Welcome to the Grindhouse* disc, featuring two limp American flicks. Howard Avedis' *The Teacher* (1974) is a timid, clumsy soft porn/thriller hybrid, in which eighteen-year-old Sean (Jay North) has an affair with his insanely hot teacher (Angel Tompkins, who appears all of a year older than the object of her affection). She's being stalked by that old standby, the Deranged Vietnam Veteran™ (Anthony James) who also blames his younger brother's accidental death on Sean. Promising set-up notwithstanding, this one's dull and slow, with amateurish performances and an excruciatingly bad script from the director of 1983's equally tepid *Mortuary* and 1984's Sybil Danning-lead sex-slasher *They're Playing With Fire*.

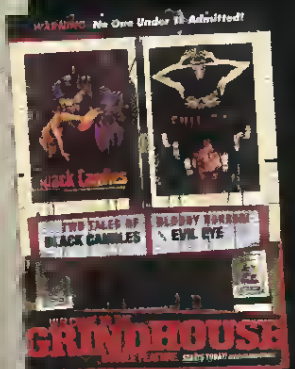


Although the trailer for *Pick Up* (1975) goes to great lengths to make it look like a rape/revenge caper, and hence pique the curiosity of the horror audience, Bennie Hirschenson's film is basically just a half-assed *Easy Rider* clone in which two flaky hippie chicks hitch a ride with a hunky counterculture type who's delivering a luxury bus from Miami to Tallahassee. If the performances here are a marked improvement over *The Teacher*, that's still hardly grounds to recommend it with a clear conscience.

BLACK CANDLES AND EVIL EYE

Directed by José Ramón Larraz and Mario Siciliano

Deimos' second DVD in the series showcases two Eurotrash titles not much better than the American duo. Despite some beautiful cinematography and an authentically Gothic vibe, *Black Candles* (a.k.a. *Los Ritos sexuales del diablo*, 1982) never quite gets out of second gear – at least nof as a horror film. If, on the other hand, old-school Spanish Eurotrash softcore porn yanks your crank, by all means get your trench coat on and keep the hankies handy. Director José Ramón Larraz (*Vampyres*) serves up no fewer than three torrid sex scenes during the first seventeen minutes (!), a jaw-dropping ritualistic woman/goat coupling (?!?) around the half-hour mark and no shortage of boots knocked thereafter. Buried somewhere beneath all the undulating flesh and untrimmed bikini lines, there's a weak-ass plot about an Italian woman (Martha Belton) travelling to England to investigate the mysterious (read: witchcraft-related) death of her brother. Starring a bunch of Z-list Italian actors, Larraz's *Black Candles* isn't much of a horror film, but neither is it an entirely disagreeable waste of 90 minutes if you hit the fast-forward button whenever no one's naked.



But then there's *Evil Eye* (a.k.a. *Eroticofollia*, 1974). If ever a horror film was designed specifically to be enjoyed while under the influence of household cleaning products, this fucked-up kitchen sink affair must surely be the one. A stylistic demolition derby of giallo, ghost story, psychological thriller, satanic horror and pre-*Nightmare on Elm Street* rubber reality, this Italian/Spanish/Mexican co-production has an American playboy (Anthony Steffen) driven to commit a series of murders in Rome at the behest of either a bunch of butt-naked devil worshippers or his own psychiatrist. Or maybe someone else entirely. "There's something unfathomable in this whole business," a detective says toward the end of the film, in case the viewer has so far failed to grasp the patently freakin' obvious. For all its incomprehensible plotting and logical gaffes that would make Dario Argento's head explode, *Evil Eye* is just the sort of thing for people who dig that sort of thing.

With so many trashy treasures still mouldering on VHS (if they had a home vid release at all), it seems a grave injustice that such flacid fare as *The Teacher* and *Pick Up* should be reissued first. As if to drive the point home, Deimos' double-feature discs are rounded out with some fun trailers for more authentic grindhouse fare, including *Don't Answer the Phone*, *The Hellcats*, *The Pom Pom Girls*, *Weekend with the Babysitter* and more. And that's it for the extras; chapter indexes would have been nice, but then again, better films would have been nice too.

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CINEMARQUEE

A TALL, TALL, TALL DRINK OF WATER

ATTACK OF THE 50 FT. WOMAN (1958)

Starring Allison Hayes, William Hudson and Yvette Vickers
Directed by Nathan Juran
Written by Mark Hanna
Warner

There are few drive-in films as notorious for their poster alone as the iconic 1958 cheapie *Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman* – voted #8 on a list of 25 Best Movie Posters of All Time by *Premiere* magazine. A long-time favourite of "bad cinema" aficionados, the picture has endured an almost universal critical slagging and boasts what are surely some of the most uproariously inept special effects this side of *Plan 9*. But a closer look at it reveals something more than an Ed Wood-ian movie experience, something more lurid, savvy and, yes, more competent than you've been led to believe.

The film stars B-movie princess Allison Hayes (*The Undead*) as Nancy Archer, a deeply troubled heiress whose philandering husband Harry (*The She-Creature*'s William Hudson) is pushing her to the edge. Seems horny Harry would like nothing more than to live out his sordid days with his mistress Honey (*Attack of the Giant Leeches*' Yvette Vickers) but he needs his wife's money to fund his dirty double dealings. A cosmic intervention arrives in the form of Nancy's chance late-night desert road encounter with a glowing orb and a big bald giant (Mike Ross) who proceeds to poke and prod her, leaving the woman quivering on a nearby rooftop. Though both Harry and the authorities initially scoff at her wild tales of super-size galactic goons, their disbelief soon turns to terror when the diminutive beauty morphs into a 50-foot-tall, scantily-clad goliath. Thinking Nancy is on the verge of lethal expansion, Harry flies the coop... and that's when the PO'd king-sized queen goes hubby hunting, laying waste to everything in her path.



Though most certainly a product of the 1950s giant, radioactive monsters subgenre (see also *The Amazing Colossal Man*, *War of the Colossal Beast*, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*), *Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman* is unique in that it boasts a proto-feminist point of view, one that serves as a lesson to all men to stand by their woman... lest they stand on you! Another highlight is the top-notch – by these standards, anyway – direction by Nathan Juran (the Ray Harryhausen-infused gems *20 Million Miles to Earth* and *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*), who perhaps wisely chose to helm it under the nom de plume "Nathan Hertz." Juran was an Oscar-winning art director as well as a noted fantasy filmmaker, and he brings much imagination to what is, in essence, a nickel-and-dime pot-boiler, creatively utilizing budget-starved sets to paint an appropriately clammy, claustrophobic atmosphere that fully erupts when Nancy finally swells up, becoming a monstrous yet very sexual icon in her Amazonian slip.

The overheated central love triangle is rather dark and conflicted as well, almost worthy of Shakespeare (Mark Hanna's script is choked with well-cooked dialogue), as the Lady Macbeth-esque Honey demands that the morally conflicted Harry kill Nancy to gain control of her kingdom. The performances are equally frenzied and leering and the film's pacing is crackerjack, making full use of its scant 65-minute running time. And yes, those much maligned (and by default celebrated) special effects are indeed as hilariously incompetent as you've heard, with both the alien giant and the extra-large Nancy being realized as cheap projections over tiny backdrops, a terrible visual that renders them oddly transparent. Even worse, when Nancy goes on the attack, the production sports a silly, moth-eaten foam rubber hand that slaps up against an unconvincingly terrorized Harry. But it is these endearing special "defects" that cemented the film's enduring reputation.



The Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman: *A proto-feminist entry in the 1950s giant, radioactive monsters subgenre.*

The film was remade in 1993 as a very forced and self-conscious full-colour spoof, starring Daryl Hannah in the Hayes role (where she grew larger the angrier she became, thus making the tale's female empowerment subtext that much more obvious), and as a lowbrow, sexed-up 1995 Fred Olen Ray send-up called *Attack of the 60 Foot Centerfold* (which emphasized the story's not-so-feminist sex object aspect).

For its DVD release, Warner has packaged it as part of their Cult Camp Classics Volume One, with 1959's *The Giant Behemoth* and the Zsa Zsa Gabor vehicle *The Queen of Outer Space*. Sporting an equally sensational trailer and a fantastic commentary by Yvette "one take" Vickers, it proves that *Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman* remains an underrated, supremely entertaining mess and a veritable, ahem, giant of B-cinema.

Chris Alexander

SNOOP DOGG

DANNY TREJO

ARIES SPEARS

ERNIE HUDSON

AND BILLY DEE WILLIAMS

AS "PASTOR CHARLIE"



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"LEAVE IT TO SNOOP TO MAKE AMENDS FOR BONES WITH HOOD OF HORROR!"
-FANGORIA

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"Tales that Witness Madness is the sort of pulp anthology gem that no one cares about any more."

The Mad Musings of a Schizoid Cinephile



by Chris Alexander

Freddie Francis is dead and that's okay. The much adored, Oscar-winning cinematographer, director and Hammer Horror icon lived a full life, working almost until the end of his 89-plus years (his last OOP gig was shooting David Lynch's *The Straight Story* in 1999). Francis, whose filmography includes *Paranoiac*, *Nightmare* and *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave*, died this past March, leaving behind a body of work that was vibrant, strange, sometimes experimental, effortlessly entertaining and distinctly British.

Now, I'm not saying his output as a director ever reached the polished heights of definitive Hammer force Terence Fisher, but Francis had a seriously arch take on the typical English Gothic style that was unique. He understood where to stick his camera and how to milk quietly kinky terror out of every frame.

Notice the word "kinky" in that last sentence? Make no mistake, Francis had a knack for the kinky (witness the Jack Palance fetish doll/serial killer vehicle *Craze* and the unclassifiable caped prehistoric monster/syphilitic psycho classic *The Creeping Flesh*) and if you chart the body of work he actually directed, you'll see a slew of lurid titles that almost always manage to blend the mundane with healthy dollops of sensational sleaze. Nowhere is this more evident than in one of my favourite Francis films, the wonky, weird and just plain out of its mind *Tales that Witness Madness*.



Made in 1973, it was no doubt inspired by the box-office success of previous Amicus omnibus shockers such as *Asylum* (which has a wrap-around remarkably similar to this pic) and Francis' own fantastic EC adaptation *Tales from the Crypt*, released the previous year. *TTWM* stars the inimitable Donald Pleasance as the vaguely sinister Dr. Tremayne, the head doctor at a quasi-futuristic, quintessentially '70s mental institution. Tremayne's unusual treatment of his patients and the explanations of said methods to the visiting Dr. Nicholas (Jack Hawkins. *Theatre of Blood*) set forth a series of alternately chilling, silly and outrageous horror stories that, you guessed it, witness madness.



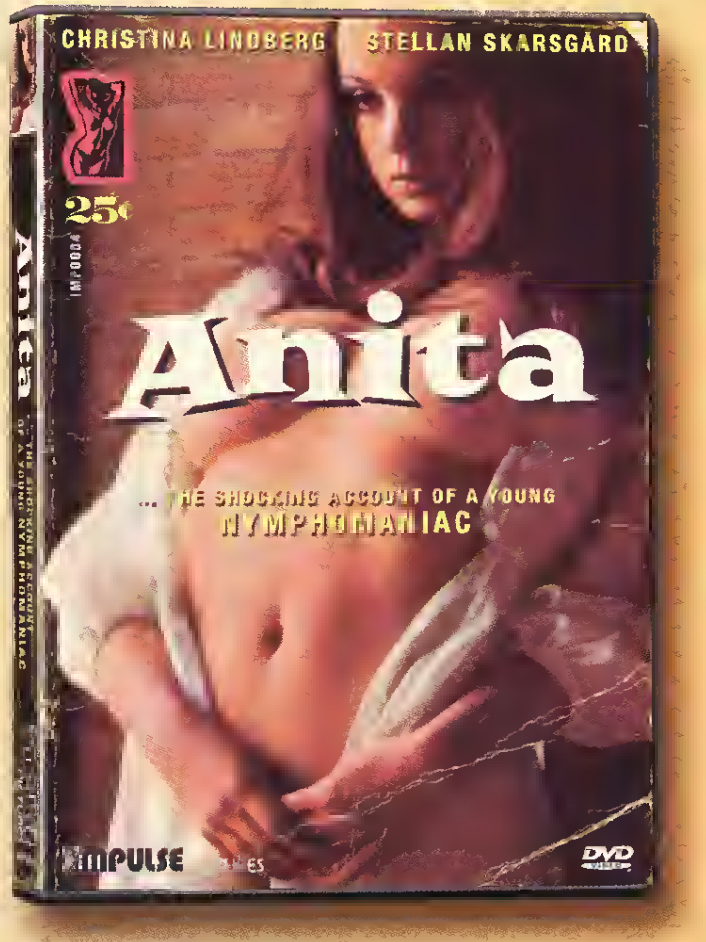
In the first, a loose rip-off of Ray Bradbury's seminal story "The Veldt," a little boy in a volatile household develops an unhealthy relationship with an imaginary pal he affectionately calls Mr. Tiger. Thing is, this flesh-eating circus refugee ain't quite satisfied with staying on the dark side of the kid's psyche and mucho bloodshed ensues. The second story features a wanky antiques dealer whose latest acquisition, a turn-of-the-century bicycle, has the power to suck him back into time – where he vainly attempts to thwart a murder. The third – and no doubt most insane – tale sees iconic bitch archetype Joan Collins as a wife whose husband has fallen under the carnal spell of a leafy hussy named "Mel," a terribly jealous and homicidal tree! Then, the final and darkest entry sees aging hottie Kim Novak as a literary agent whose much younger boy toy is actually a cannibal voodoo priest. When all the sordid stories are finally told, the narrative once again shifts to Pleasance and Hawkins for a nihilistic finale that is as enigmatic as it is chilling.

What a cast! What classy, yet ever so slightly scummy fun! *Tales that Witness Madness* is the sort of pulp anthology gem that no one cares about any more. In fact, it's debatable if anyone has ever really much cared for this particular film, save yours truly. This is probably due to the fact that virtually the only way you can see it now is by tracking down the long-out-of-print Paramount VHS that's rarer than the human steak tartar Mr. Tiger enjoys. I love this movie, flaws and all, and treasure it as one of the many gifts that the late visionary left as evidence of his turn on this mortal coil. And while I'll no doubt spend many a future Schizoid Cinephile column raving rabidly about Freddie Francis' work, until then, Alexander out.

ONE YEAR BEFORE "THRILLER: A CRUEL PICTURE", CHRISTINA LINDBERG STUNNED AUDIENCES WITH HER PORTRAYAL OF A TEENAGE NYMPHOMANIAC...

ANITA
Diary of a Nymphomaniac

A young girl named Anita (Lindberg) suffers from psychological problems and sexual promiscuity due to her troubled childhood and uncaring parents. She meets Erik (Skarsgård) , a student at a local university, who tries to help her through her troubles by analyzing her past relationships. After revealing her most intimate and violent encounters to Erik, he determines that, in order for her to overcome her nymphomania, she first must experience a "true" orgasm! ANITA is a classic of controversial Swedish exploitation starring cult film starlet Christina Lindberg (THRILLER: A CRUEL PICTURE) and a very young Stellan Skarsgård (PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: AT WORLD'S END) in one of his first ever film roles!

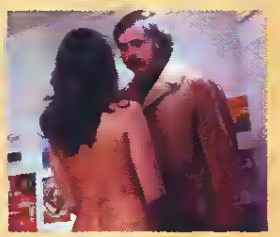


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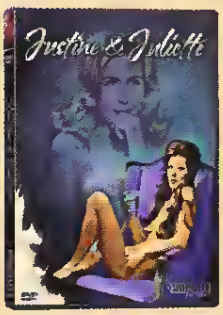


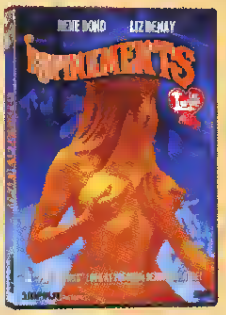
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IN THIS ISSUE!

THE SPECTRE
Various writers and artists *DC*

ARKADIAN: NO WITNESS
Stephen L. Antczak and Riq *Visible Light*

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER #1–4
Joss Whedon and Georges Jeanty *Dark Horse*

THE CREATURE FROM THE DEPTHS
Mark Kidwell and Jay Fotos *Image*

HACK/SLASH #2
Tim Seely and Emily Stone *Devil's Due*

JONAH HEX #1–21
Jimmy Palmiotti, Justin Gray and various artists *DC*

Fun, adventure, vengeance and the unexpected – four things readers should theoretically expect when reading about The Spectre, a hard-boiled horror character that is also one of DC's oldest (anti-)heroes. Period. Certainly, each of those qualifiers applies in its own inconsistent way, as the phantom/entity/force has played the lead in more than a half-dozen titles, among them *More Fun Comics* (the '40s), *Adventure Comics* (the '70s), *Day of Vengeance* (2005) and *Tales of the Unexpected* (2007).

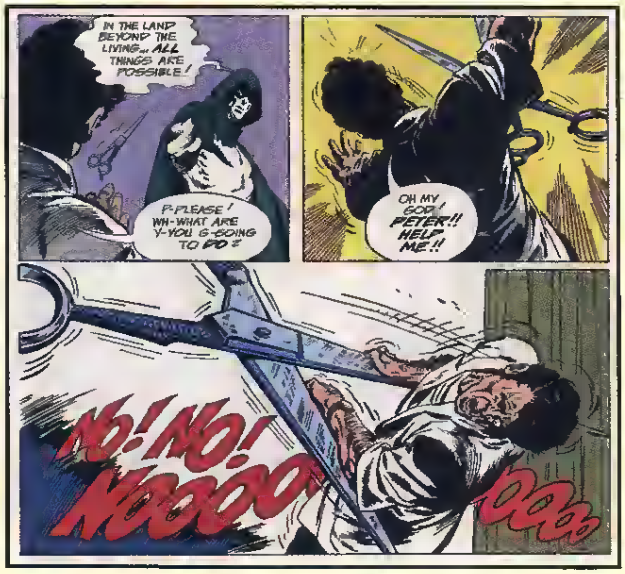
That said, Nebulous Comics or Exploits in Theological Confusion might be more appropriate titles. With almost seven decades of continuity baggage and three (to date) human hosts, The Spectre – a judge/jury/executioner who's completely unhinged – is more than a little unfocused.

Co-created by Jerry Siegel of *Superman* fame The Spectre debuted in issue #52 of *More Fun Comics* in 1940 and his early adventures were not dissimilar to those of the Man of Steel. Among The Spectre's consistent traits are omniscience and cosmic-level power; he is also almost always assigned the status of being The Wrath of God (given the "wrath" component, I'm leaning Old Testament-style God here). In a crime context, these traits roughly translate into the ability to (a) identify the guilty without ever making a mistake and (b) punish the guilty with extreme prejudice, as a fairly common bonus, no extra charge. The omniscience raises the question as to why it was even necessary to have its human host for the first 50-plus years be a cop, really, a superfluous skill set, no? As with Bat-Man in *Detective Comics*, actual detection had little to do with the proceedings.



In the early '70s, the writing team of Michael Fleischer and Russell Carley took the reins at DC's *Adventure Comics* and, teaming mostly with penciller Jim Aparo, brought back the Spectre in a ten-issue run that remains controversial today. Specifically, where the character had previously killed the guilty, he now tortured and killed them. The torture was sometimes poetic, at least in a "justice" sense, and always, at the very least, bizarre (hence the title being briefly renamed *Weird Adventure Comics* as early as The Spectre's third appearance).

As the driving force on the writing side, Fleischer realized that the creative use of the character's limitless powers could make for some interesting visuals. Three murderers are dispatched in the first issue, *Adventure* #431, one of them being outright melted and, yes, quite conscious of it happening. The second issue contains arguably the most famous execution: death by giant scissors [pictured] with The Spectre looking on, cold and completely detached. Future issues would include bodies variously turned to glass and shattered, made into mannequins and drawn and quartered, transformed into clay and diced. Grim stuff, sure, but fun as well. Fast-forward a decade, and the film debut of surrealist slasher Freddy Krueger makes a bit more sense in light of the fact that writer/director Wes Craven is a comic book fan.



*When it comes to rough justice, The Spectre always makes the cut (**Adventure Comics** #432).*

Continuing forward, the last few decades have seen a number of changes in The Spectre's universe, many of them arbitrary, some of them ill-advised. Perhaps the best of the changes, though, occurred two years ago, during DC's "Infinite Crisis" crossover. Another murdered police detective, Crispus Allen of the Gotham City PD, assumed the mantle and, I'm happy to report, is finding his detective skills to be a requirement in his new "job."

At least, such is the case in the recent eight-issue miniseries, *Tales of the Unexpected*, wherein Allen must solve the murder of a ghetto apartment superintendent in order to prevent the outraged Spectre from (inadvertently?) executing every tenant in the building. Written by David Lapham of *Stray Bullets* fame, the story itself is chock full of shortcomings, including a character-heavy script that fails to distinguish the players beyond the level of walking clichés. But Lapham is to be applauded for bringing one very interesting distinction to the fore. In the eyes of humans, evil has degrees, but in the eyes of The Spectre, it is an absolute. Moving forward, the character's current host being a detective can now be defined as a necessary part of a check/balance system – a human side to the horror. After the better part of 75 years, it's about time.

QUICK CUTS

REVIEWS BY GARY BUTLER, MONICA S. KUEBLER AND MARK MOYES

One shouldn't judge books by their covers – especially in comics, which have a reputation for promising too much. Go figure, the cover of *Arkadian: No Witness* gives away too little. This quirky one-shot stars a black magic hitman who, in the process of killing a Senator's voodoo-practicing mistress, is additionally forced to mow down a never-ending line of unlikely witnesses. There's a goofy sense of humour at play, both in the script and art (which alternates between serious and cartoony). Though the book suffers from a confusing intro, its real problem is that cover, which advertises a straight-up crime comic, when its protagonist is really more of a cross between, of all things, a mercenary Punisher and Hellblazer. Still: recommended. MM



Set immediately after the TV show's finale, the first four-issue arc of the new *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* comic (the "official" Season 8) got off to a rocky start trying to usher in too much plot: Buffy and Xander are now running a military-style organization (an army of roughly 500 new slayers, called to duty during Season 7), Dawn has become a giant and Willow is missing from issue #1 entirely. Still, master-plotter Joss Whedon never lets anything happen without a reason and by issue #3 the story that he described as "too big for TV" hits its stride with the return of several minor characters as bad guys and the US Army thinking that Buffy's Slayerettes are terrorists. Gore visuals are relatively tame, but plenty of monster-packed action sequences will satisfy general horror (and specifically *Buffy*) fans. Issues 5-8 are by Brian K. Vaughan (*Y: The Last Man*, *Swamp Thing*), so colour us intrigued. MSK



An unabashed cross between *Creature from the Black Lagoon* and *Dagon*, the 36-page (and regularly priced – nice!) one-shot *The Creature from the Depths* follows some freak-show charlatans recruited by a touch-sensitive benefactor to deep-dive for treasure in a decidedly Lovecraftian locale. You want "in" references? How about a boat called "Derleth," a mud-splattered signpost reading "In(n)smo(uth)," a protagonist named "Herbert," etc. It's another swamp-solid single-issue story from two thirds of the team that brought us *'68* (see *RM#63*). My sole disappointment is minor: the questionable value of sacrificing the creature's nifty design with a cover spotlight. A little bit of mystery could have elevated this tale from merely entertaining to actually creepy. GB



With a movie deal in the works, publisher Devil's Due has promoted *Hack/Slash* (*RM#52*) from mini to ongoing series. The stakes have been raised, and so far, the creative team is mostly up to the task. "These days it's all about gore and torture," said the walking *Hellraiser* homage in issue #1. Writer Tim Seely's a smart boy, all right, liberally using *Scream*-style quips to disarm his cliché-ridden stories and make them palatable. No grandiose statements here, it really is all about gore and torture (and beyond-sophomoric sexploitation, such as the groan-inducing stripper with a heart of gold). Regardless, Seely's strong sense of humour saves his bacon time and again. For example, having one hero locate another using a Pet Tracker microchip is hilarious but practical. New artist Emily Stone has her leads down pat but needs to work a bit harder on her villains; evil band Acid Washed, an intentionally motley metal homage, looks silly where sinister is clearly the goal. GB



It's not impossible that horror comics' current best-kept secret is *Jonah Hex*, a '70s and '80s DC mainstay about a horribly scarred frontier outlaw whose sense of ethics is rivalled by his lust for vengeance. Revamped for a modern audience, the title taps the hyper-grim 'n' grittiness of HBO's *Deadwood*, delivering dark western violence in spades. Most of the stories are done-in-ones, making it easy to jump in at any point. Horror rears its sinister head every five or so issues, and is stronger for the sparing measures. Consider absolutely superb tales like "Gettin' Un-Haunted" (issue #9, a brilliant reverse ghost story) and "The Hangin' Tree" (issue #11, wherein a dark "friend" rescues a lynched Hex), not to mention the shocking identity of walking Death in issues #16-17. And hats off to Luke Ross and Phil Noto, the best of the many excellent participating artists, who draws a truly terrifying scarred-up version of Clint Eastwood. GB



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the Ninth Circle BOOKS

Network Nightmares • Lugosi's Legacy • A Creepy Conspiracy



Television Fright Films of the 1970s

David Deal

McFarland & Company

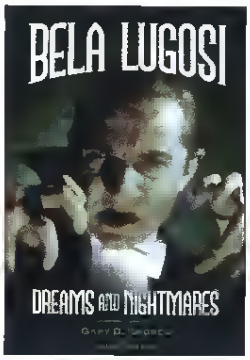
There was a time, way before nickel-and-dime reality shows usurped the airwaves, when network television was considered an art form. At no time was this more evident than in the 1970s, when the movie-of-the-week reigned supreme. Real writers were writing real stories for talented craftsmen, and excellent, usually older, actors delivered solid pulp B-flick thrills to audiences who still demanded mature and challenging programming. Author David Deal explores the darker strains of these unique, compact, occasionally brilliant and always entertaining mini-movies in *Television Fright Films of the 1970s*, an intriguing reference book from McFarland & Company.

Admittedly, this critic must confess a bias, as I'm already a loyal devotee of both late-night retro film binges and late, great TV horror trendsetter Dan Curtis (*Dark Shadows*). Curtis was responsible for some of the greatest small screen shockers, including the Richard Matheson-penned *Dracula* (featuring Jack Palance), the classic Karen Black vehicle *Trilogy of Terror* and, of course, groundbreaking Kolchak films *The Night Stalker* and *The Night Strangler*. But, as Deal reveals, Curtis wasn't the only major player during those bygone cathode ray days. The late workman director Curtis Harrington (*The Dead Don't Die*, *The Cat Creature*) also churned out scads of these quality pulse-pounders, and lest we forget that the decade also spawned one of the most important TV films of all time: 1971's *Duel*, directed by a snot-nosed upstart named Steven Spielberg!

Primarily, *Television Fright Films of the 1970s* offers an alphabetical glossary of critical reviews of these films and, as per usual with these types of books, there's no guarantee that the reader will agree with Deal's assessments. For example, it's really nice to finally see some love ladled onto one of my favourite TV terrors, the underrated and quietly influential 1974 gem *Bad Ronald*, but it's also somewhat disparaging to read Deal's dismissal of Tobe Hooper's brilliant 1979 Stephen King riff *Salem's Lot* and Curtis' creepy 1976 effort *The Norliss Tapes*. Ah well, to each his own.

Television Frights of the 1970s is an original, engaging analysis of an often ignored offshoot of the genre we all adore. Consider it recommended.

Chris Alexander



Bela Lugosi: Dreams and Nightmares

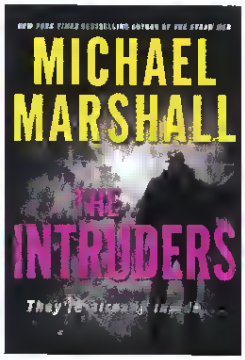
Gary D. Rhodes, with Richard Sheffield

Collectibles Press

Number One Fan Gary D. Rhodes plumbs every minute detail of Bela Lugosi's life for his latest tome on the horror icon. The actor's CV, which includes *White Zombie*, *The Black Cat*, *Mark of the Vampire*, *The Raven*, *The Wolf Man*, *The Body Snatcher* and, of course, *Dracula*, demands the respect of the obsessed, after all.

Not just a horror movie icon, Lugosi was also a larger-than-life figure, morphine addict and prodigious drinker with five failed marriages. Anyone who's seen *Ed Wood* can attest to the man's dismal final bow as a member of the Ed Wood acting troupe, but that's only one small part of *Dreams and Nightmares*. Rhodes (who previously published *Lugosi: His Life in Films, on Stage and in the Hearts of Horror Lovers*, directed *Lugosi: Hollywood's Vampire* and dedicated an entire book to the dissection of *White Zombie*) thankfully chose to concentrate on previously undiscovered information about the Hungarian actor for this new release. So, this isn't just a rehash of old material gussied up with a few unpublished photos of Lugosi sashaying around in a cloak.

For *Dreams and Nightmares*, Rhodes uses interviews with new sources, as well as declassified OSS and FBI files. He also unearths early silent films, television appearances and radio and stage performances, along with films that never made it beyond the script phase, such as *The Phantom Ghoul* and *The Vampire's Tomb*. The book is incredibly well researched and annotated – Rhodes unravels discrepancies about Lugosi's early stage appearances in Szeged and Budapest and looks at his com-





The Grim Reader

METAL: THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE
Gary Sharpe-Young
Jawbone Press



Hailz metal fans! Presented here is a black bible of more than 240 bands from the world-wide metal community and all its subgenres: Doom, Death, Thrash, Power, Heavy, Gothic, Japanese, Finnish, UK – you name it, it's chronicled in exhausting detail, beginning with Black Sabbath, of course. With a foreword by Judas Priest's Rob Halford, this one's heavy duty.

Jovanka Vuckovic

THE RED DAHLIA
Lynda La Plante
Touchstone



La Plante, best known for TV series like *Prime Suspect*, should probably have stuck to screenplays. That's a shame, because the book's concept is intriguing – London is plagued by serial killings mimicking the famous 1940s Black Dahlia murders. Unfortunately, the female detective protagonist seems irritatingly stupid and the rest of the characters don't fare much better. Perhaps actors could have breathed more life into this mostly lacklustre story.

Sandra Kasturi

THE 7TH VOYAGE OF SKETCHY THINGS
Frank Dietz
Self-Published



In his seventh volume of illustrations, artist (and *Rock n' Roll Nightmare* co-star!) Frank Dietz introduces a more realistic style that showcases monsters rendered in charcoal, pencil, watercolour, pastels and oils. The perfect-bound softcover even includes some tips for burgeoning creature artists as well as an essay by horror author and collector David J. Schow. Nostalgic!

Jovanka Vuckovic



Dreams and Nightmares: *Not just another rehashed Lugosi biography.*

munist sympathies and the lengths to which he went to hide them during the McCarthy era.

The book contains a wealth of information and is equal parts entertaining tell-all biography, zealously compiled hard data and nerd boy reminiscences via Lugosi's latter-day friendship with the then-teenage Richard Sheffield. This makes *Dreams and Nightmares* an excellent introduction to a talented and complicated man often unfairly mocked (like Fat Elvis) for the tragic end of his life and career.

Tom Murray

The Intruders
Michael Marshall
William Morrow

The Intruders marks Michael Marshall Smith's first attempt to bridge the gap between his sci-fi/horror books written under his real name (*One of Us*, *What You Make It*, *Only Forward* and *Spares*, which was optioned by Steven Spielberg's Dreamworks) and those later *Straw Men* serial killer thrillers that Stephen King called "scary as hell," which were simply credited to Michael Marshall. Venturing into John Connolly (*The Black Angel*) territory, *The Intruders* combines a conspiracy theory plot with overtly supernatural tendencies, with a dash of sci-fi thrown in for good measure.

Ex-traffic cop Jack Whalen has carved out a successful career for himself, albeit accidentally, as a writer. His book, "The Intruders," revolves around pictures taken of places where break-ins have occurred. Now based in Seattle, he's considering a sequel when an old friend from school drops by asking for his help to figure something out. Lawyer Gary Fisher tells him about the murder of a woman and her teenage son, in which the husband is suspected. Jack can't see what this has to do with him, until his own wife Amy begins to behave suspiciously and he becomes







FILM SCHOLAR **TOM WEAVER** CELEBRATES THE GOLDEN AGE OF HORROR AND SCI-FI FILMMAKING IN THREE REISSUED BOOKS CONTAINING RARE INTERVIEWS WITH THE GENRE'S GIANTS AND ITS UNSUNG HEROES.

FROM THE ARCHIVES OF A HORROR HISTORIAN

BY PAUL CORUPE

Even after repeated viewings of a favourite B-movie classic from the late 1950s, we can only speculate as to what might have been going through a director's mind when he decided to construct a giant killer crab out of papier mâché or turn a dingy poverty row studio into an even dingier mad scientist's lair. That's why interviews with not only the directors but also the performers, writers, makeup effects men and other behind-the-scenes artists are so essential to understanding this formative period. Nobody knows this better than writer and critic Tom Weaver, a lifelong fan of monster movies and fantastic cinema who has been recording the memories and anecdotes of these genre filmmakers since the early 1980s. Now, McFarland & Company are reissuing three of Weaver's indispensable volumes in softcover: *Interviews with B Science Fiction and Horror Movie Makers*; *Science Fiction Stars and Horror Heroes: Interviews with Actors, Directors and Writers of the 1940s-1960s*, and *Eye on Science Fiction: 20 Interviews with Classic SF and Horror Filmmakers*.



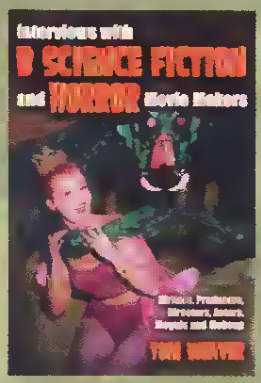
"Back then, there weren't many magazines that covered the old movies," Weaver explains from his home in Sleepy Hollow, New York. "When a magazine like *Cinefantastique* or *Photon* did track down a moviemaker, it was generally Ray Harryhausen, Roger Corman or Christopher Lee – somebody who had been interviewed 116 times already. Except for a few occasions in *Cinefantastique*, the less well-known moviemakers were not really being written about."



In 1981 Weaver's love of reading these articles prompted him to try his hand at interviewing, so he contacted directors Richard Cunha (*Giant from the Unknown*) and Ed Bernds (*Return of the Fly*). Unable to afford expensive long-distance calls, Weaver mailed each of them a list of questions and some blank audio cassettes to record their thoughts.

"When Cunha got my list, he said he had a better idea," Weaver recalls. "He got the guy who produced his movies, Arthur A. Jacobs, and they sat down in front of a video camera and answered the questions. I was just blown away by that, and it encouraged me to keep going. Now I'm up around 600 interviews – I just can't get this monkey off my back!"

Weaver's early Q&A with Cunha and Jacobs is just one of the highlights of *Interviews with B Science Fiction and Horror Movie Makers*, which, like his other two recently reprinted books, contains fascinating interviews originally published in sci-fi and horror-minded magazines such as *Video Watchdog*, *Videoscope*, *Starlog*, *Fangoria* and *Classic Images*. But while most readers may initially be drawn to Weaver's sessions with recognizable names such as Janet Leigh, Richard Matheson, John Agar and AIP bigwig Sam Arkoff, these books are also treasure troves of recollections from more obscure filmmakers, such as 1960s trash merchant Del Tenney, *House on Haunted Hill* scribe Robb White, prolific genre film composer Albert Glasser and even minor starlet Teala Loring.



"I still enjoy interviewing semi-unheard of and even completely unknown people from behind the camera the most," says Weaver, who adds that his subjects are frequently surprised that someone wants to know about these films at all. "Most of these people are so uninterested in their old output that they don't even own copies. The idea that others do and want to talk to them just blows their minds."

Weaver counts his interviews with *Son of Frankenstein* child star Donnie Dunagan, Universal sci-fi producer William Alland and teen idol wannabe Arch Hall Jr. among his favourites. He says that even if he had a time machine he'd probably pass on the big-name guys such as Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi and James Whale. Instead, he wishes he could have sat down with producer Val Lewton (*Cat People*, *I Walked with a Zombie*, *Isle of the Dead*). "He would be tops on my list. I'm sure he gave short interviews back in his day, but as far as I know, he never talked extensively about his whole career."

For vintage horror fans, it's this candid passion that makes Weaver's books so prized and, amazingly, Weaver isn't even close to running out of genre personalities to interview. He still has plans for at least another three or four books.

"I have another 100 people buzzing around in my head that I want to talk to before it's too late," he reveals. "The main reason I do it is that I really love talking to these people, and they seem to enjoy finding out people are interested in them. It's the fun that really attracts me."



Bottomfeeder
B.H. Fingerman
M Press

Comics scribe B.H. Fingerman's (*Zombie World: Winter's Dregs*) debut novel *Bottomfeeder* is just the kick in the guts that the pasty-faced, velvet-draped vampire genre's had coming to it for two decades. His punchy, postmodern prose reads like Richard Matheson by way of Chuck Palahniuk, a first-person, stream-of-consciousness staccato liberally punctuated with pop culture pisstakes and enriched by an amusingly grim, and refreshingly self-deprecating, sense of humour.



Bottomfeeder is a darkly comedic journey through the rat-infested, urine-stained trenches of modern urban vampirism. Our tour guide is a depressed, underachieving neophyte bloodsucker named Phil Merman, who is neither a conscienceless predator nor an angst-ridden navel-gazer – he's just a middle-aged New York Jew who looks half his age. He spends his days inside his cramped, rent-controlled apartment avoiding a terminal tan and his nights at a dead-end job archiving a seemingly endless chain of gruesome crime scene photos, all while he dines on the denizens of the city's grisly underbelly and wonders where everything went wrong.

Fingerman's portrayal of undying self-aware parasites who are just as mundane, lonely and screwed up as the humans they prey upon, is exactly what makes *Bottomfeeder* stand out. Phil Merman's ennui is not the same old sighing, superficial, ceaseless angst of the immortals; he's just having a garden variety midlife crisis, but thanks to his condition, it's one that might never actually end. However, he does find respite from his night-to-night drudgery in Eddie Frye, a hard-partying vampire who teaches Phil that there's more to the afterlife than he imagined.

Fingerman's plotting is on the thin side, and he tends to stumble over his own scattershot references at times, but he packs his pages with so many amusingly offbeat angles on vampire subcultures (vampires with Down's Syndrome, vampire children with Progeria who are just starting to look their age, and, god help us, a therapy group for neurotic bloodsuckers), that those flaws are easily ignored. For a subgenre that has long suffered from anemic ideas and ever-paler imitations, *Bottomfeeder*'s the perfect antidote.

Joseph O'Brien

embroiled in a conspiracy the likes of which the world has never seen. But just what all this has to do with a missing girl called Madison, who's travelling across the country and keeps having blackouts, or with the FBI man called Shepherd on her trail, is something you'll have to find out for yourself. Who are the real Intruders? The answer might just blow your mind.

With this latest novel, Marshall delivers a page-turner that is unlike anything else on bookstore shelves right now. Part *X-Files*, part *24*, but easily surpassing both in the suspense and goosebumps departments, this is just the sort of book you won't be able to put down once you start reading. It's inventive, full of believable characters and terrific dialogue. This is dark fantasy noir for the 21st century that really gets under your skin.

Paul Kane

Love Lies Dying
Steve Gerlach
Bloodletting Press

Pity poor John Murdock, the protagonist of *Love Lies Dying*. Arriving home after a hard grind at the office, he discovers there's a naked girl on his sofa, and his wife is nowhere to be found. The sartorially-challenged Zoe turns out to be a woman with a terrifying and violent past, *and* a serious jones for life's darker pleasures.

Love Lies Dying is a tale of power and retribution that twists and turns like a finely wielded bullwhip. The novel undercuts its many strengths, however, by adhering to a tired moral paradigm. The trope of the deviant psycho-woman seeking savage and brutal sexual revenge, only to get her comeuppance in the final reel, is as old and knackered as Michael Douglas' mug. Sexually transgressive women have been punished in literature since Gutenberg cranked out the story of Jezebel in moveable type. This is not an argument in favour of sanitizing horror literature (or any literature) in the name of political correctness; rather it's an entreaty to talented authors like Gerlach to please, for the love of Satan himself, try something new. Gerlach doesn't explore the moral grey areas of his characters' personalities, and this is a crying shame. In a novel that contains so much sado-masochistic sex and plays heavily on the erotics of crime and punishment, it seems far too pedestrian to close the story with the downfall of the glorious Zoe Barber, when the object of her brutal attention – himself no angel – effectively heads back to the suburbs with his vanilla-scented sweetie. The book is tightly plotted, dramatic and tense, but the sexual double-standard which pervades it is enough to make one don one's overalls, shave one's head, and start shouting about the Equal Rights Amendment.



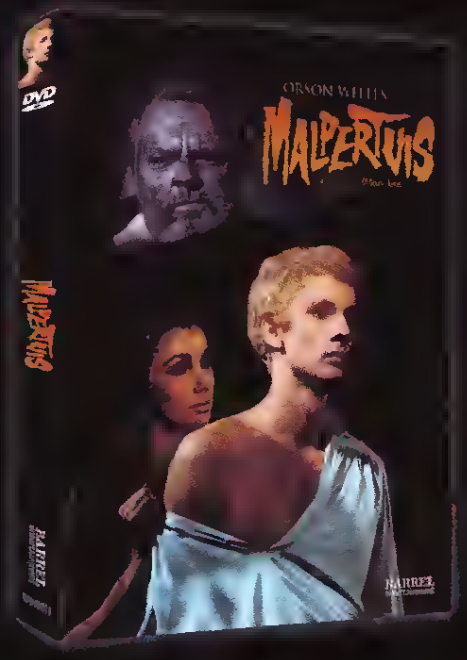
Gerlach is a skilled writer, and he has written an erotic and savage novel which touches on some dark areas of human psychology, but the heavy-handed morality play found within is just too much. With a little more thought, he could have done a hell of a lot better.

Justine Warwick





From the Director of DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS comes



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TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR

DEARLY DEPARTED TOURS HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA

BY JASON WILLIAM MCNEIL

HOLLY

At first glance, sunny Los Angeles and the celebrity-driven sheen of Hollywood doesn't hold much interest for serious horror fans and other aficionados of the bizarre, unnerving and decidedly non-mainstream. Scratch the shiny surface of Tinseltown, however, and you'll find that beneath the glitz and glamour festers a layer of nastiness made up of equal parts broken dreams and broken bodies. The road to stardom is littered with corpses, and Scott Michaels, director of Dearly Departed Tours, is the man who knows where the bodies are buried.

A self-described "death hag," Michaels traces his fascination with celebrity death and dying to the passings of Martin Luther King Jr. and Janis Joplin. And when troubled former Supremes singer Florence Ballard died in 1976 at age 32, from a blood clot, Michaels became truly obsessed.

As a youngster, he got in the habit of flipping to the end of biographies to find out how and where their subjects died. If there were photos, so much the better. (Michaels admits he can still stare for hours at the photo of Marilyn Monroe being removed from her Brentwood home in a body bag.) At the same time, he discovered the joy of cemeteries, once ditching a Boy Scout hike to explore a graveyard.

Morbid childhood fascinations grew into a hobby, a career and, finally, his life's calling. Early efforts at marketing dead celebrity memorabilia (key chains, T-shirts and so forth) and online networking between the similarly obsessed (his site, findadeath.com, which "assembles the stories of people's deaths, with photographs," receives about 11,000 hits a day) set the stage for his big move to Hollywood and the opening of Dearly Departed Tours, a unique bus ride through some of Hollywierd's chilling death (and film) locations.

A far cry from more mundane Hollywood star tours where one can thrill to the site of Bob Barker's driveway(!), an afternoon aboard the Dearly Departed Tour's "Tomb Buggy" (a comfortable, air-conditioned touring van) is a three-hour exercise in deliciously macabre voyeurism, catering to the death hag in all of us. Knowledgeably navigating the twists and turns of LA's dark underbelly, Michaels takes his turistas to visit such diverse sites as the LaBianca house, where the Manson Family murdered Leno and Rosemary LaBianca following the Sharon Tate slaughter, and the unhappy home where murderous brothers Erik and Lyle Menendez sent their parents into the great beyond ("the *real* nightmare on Elm Street!" proclaims Michaels).

Other sites of historical nastiness include the lot where the dismembered body of aspiring actress Elizabeth "Betty" Short – better known as The Black Dahlia – was found in 1947, and the bungalow where George "Superman" Reeves proved he was not in fact "faster than a speeding bullet." Michaels, whose knowledge has been tapped for various documentary specials such as *Death by Excess*, *Dead Famous* and *E! 20 Most Horrifying Hollywood Murders*, knows his harrowing Hollywood history and provides a running commentary with many disturbing yet fascinating morsels, relevant audio clips (including 911 calls and a song recorded for Beach Boy Brian Wilson by then-houseguest and hanger-on Charles Manson!), plus the occasional photo. Other "last gasp" sites include the spots where Bela Lugosi, Frank Sinatra, River Phoenix and Dee Dee Ramone shuffled off this mortal coil.



For film fanatics, Michaels guides his guests to the locations where creepy classics *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* and *Dead Again* were shot, as well as a detour to an unassuming, tree-lined LA street that any fright fan worth his over-sized kitchen knife will instantly recognize as *Halloween*'s Haddonfield. (Of course, if your significant other doesn't share your zeal for the morbid, the van also passes the Cunningham home from *Happy Days* and the football field that hosted the Rydell High graduation carnival at the end of *Grease*.)

Even the Dream Factory's most famous landmark, the giant "Hollywood" sign perched high in the hills, is a harbinger of death, so naturally a drive up to it is on the agenda (although visitors can only get so close – there are fences and helicopters to greet trespassers). What follows is a typical gem from the tour. On the 18th of September, 1932, failed actress Lillian Millicent "Peg" Entwistle decided that life lived un-famous wasn't worth living at all. After some early success playing opposite Humphrey Bogart in the play *The Mad Hopes* and an RKO contract that had yielded one film, *Thirteen Women* (with most of her scenes ending up on the cutting room floor), the British-born actress' career had stalled. She'd been unsuccessfully auditioning while desperately trying to save enough money to make the move back to New York, where she had previously appeared in eight consecutive Broadway shows – all flops! After each failed audition, Peg returned home to her Uncle Harold's house in Beachwood Canyon, almost in the shadow of the sign that then read "HOLLYWOODLAND," which seemed to taunt her from on high with unfulfilled promises and failed dreams of stardom. That Sunday, Peg trekked up to the famous sign, climbed the workman's ladder behind the "H" and leapt to her death. The next

WOOD

morning, her suicide note and body were discovered by a hiker. Although legend has it that the following day a letter arrived from the Beverly Hills Playhouse offering Peg the lead role in a play, Michaels says he believes that last bit to be nothing more than wishful thinking, concocted to give the story a juicy ending. (Fun fact: when the Hollywood sign was renovated in 1978, shock rocker Alice Cooper sponsored the last O for $28,000 in memory of Groucho Marx.)

While Dearly Departed has no pretence of being a typical Hollywood bus tour, in the City of Angels, still-living celebrities are nearly impossible to avoid, so Michaels occasionally indulges his passengers with near-misses of the not-yet-dead variety; if the quickest route from one prime spot for historical rubbernecking to another just so happens to pass by Billy Bob Thornton's house and the balcony door is open, the Tomb Buggy has been known to pause a moment to see if Angelina's ex-hubby will emerge. Any brushes with still-living fame on the Dearly Departed Tour, however, are entirely incidental.

No matter how morbidly engaging the sites and stories of the Hollywood hereafter may be (and Michaels has got a million of 'em), the fact remains that three hours is a long time to spend on a bouncing bus winding its way up and down the Hollywood Hills. About two hours in, Dearly Departed's tourists tend to find themselves ready for a bathroom break – and tour director Michaels manages to make even this pit stop an entertaining event, if not necessarily a gruesome one. If you gotta stop to use the facilities somewhere, he figures, then what better place to do that than the very spot where singer George Michael was unceremoniously outed by the Los Angeles police department? As public restrooms go, it's nice enough, albeit smaller than average – one might even say cozy. Displaying his delightfully "sick" sense of humour, Scott provides all Dearly Departed tourists with complimentary copies of the ex-Wham!-man's arrest report.

Dearly Departed Tours depart daily, Wednesday through Sunday at 1p.m., from the corner of McCadden Place and Hollywood Boulevard. Price is $35 US per body. Seating is limited to thirteen passengers, so calling ahead for a reservation is highly recommended. Private tours are also available. For more information, call 323-466-3696 or visit dearlydepartedtours.com.







Death Drive: *(top to bottom) Fallen starlet Lillian Millicent "Peg" Entwistle, "the Wallace house" on Orange Grove as seen in* ***Halloween****, the former Menendez family home, (opposite) the Hollywood sign before its renovation in 1978 and the Dearly Departed Tomb Buggy.*

Photo of the Wallace house courtesy of Sean Clark.

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THE GORE-MET MENU

The Gore-met samples a 1990s mélange of video sex and violence from Japan.



SPLATTER: NAKED BLOOD (1995)

Starring Sadao Abe, Misa Aika and Mika Kirihara
Directed by Hisayasu Sato
Written by Taketoshi Watari
Discotek

The *Guinea Pig* series spawned a blood tide of shot-on-video gore films in Japan that ran the gamut from the over-the-top-style gross-outs of that series to poverty-stricken mutilation-fetish obscurities such as *Women's Flesh: My Red Guts*. One of the more oddball entries in this canon of adult video is *Naked Blood*, a metaphysical horror film a nipple slice above the straight-up splatter it is associated with. It's also the best known work of Hisayasu Sato, a prolific director whose filmography is peppered with such titles as *Lolita: Vibrator Torture* and *Office Lady Rape: Devouring the Giant Tits!*

The plot centres on Eiji (Sadao Abe), the teenaged prodigy of two brilliant medical researchers. Eiji develops a revolutionary painkiller that causes the brain to produce massive amounts of pleasurable endorphins when pain is felt. He injects some into an experimental contraceptive his mother is testing on three young women, to gauge its effect. The women have an adverse reaction to the drug, one that intensifies their personality quirks to absurd and horrific sexual extremes.



Naked Blood is notorious for its gooey gore sequences, specifically a scene in which one woman takes a knife and fork to her genitals before plucking out her eye and eating it. But the fair amount of class gore on display isn't the focus of the film; instead it services a rather esoteric and thoughtful story which explores parental loss, youthful angst and alienation… and the nightlife of goggle-wearing indoor cacti (!). Despite Sato's sex film pedigree, *Naked Blood* plays above the belt and is more in line with the work of Kiyoshi Kurosawa (*Cure, Charisma*) than the *Guinea Pig* films of Hideshi Hino.

Naked Blood was shot on video but is presented in anamorphic 1.85:1 widescreen, granting the film a cinematic aesthetic unusual to the format. Extras include a photo gallery, a brief write-up on Sato, his filmography and trailers for five other Asian sex and splatter oddities (including *Sexy Soccer*!).

RED ROOM (1999)

Starring Hiroshi Kitasenju, Sheena Nagamori and Mayumi Ookawa
Written and directed by Daisuke Yamanouchi
Unearthed Films

"Reality" television is one of the signs of the coming apocalypse. Extreme game shows, including *Survivor, Big Brother* and *Fear Factor*, have made virtues out of greed and vanity through a parade of shameless contestants willing to choke down live meal worms or jog around a track while puking into a bucket for a few bucks and fifteen minutes of fame. That makes *Red Room* both prescient and sadly relevant.

The film is set in a red room that contains a table, four chairs, a cell, a Rubbermaid tote full of sundry household items, and hidden cameras. Four contestants vie for ten million yen by playing The King's Game. Each is dealt one of four cards; whoever draws the crown orders two players holding appropriately numbered cards to enter the cell and complete a humiliating task within an allotted time period or face elimination. Ostensibly, the contestant with the least amount of self-respect wins the cash.

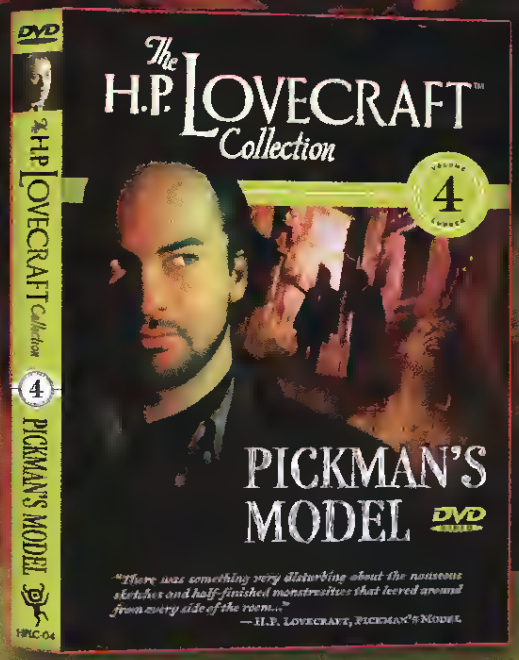
The challenges start out innocently enough. Isawa, the lone male, orders two of the women to kiss for several minutes. Then one is bound to an office chair with duct tape and spun around until she projectile vomits. The vindictiveness of the tasks rapidly escalates into outrageous violence.

Red Room gained notoriety on the bootleg market, as would any film that features women being beaten, urinated on or raped with a light bulb until it shatters. But peeling back the video mud for this DVD release reveals one of the foibles of the format – the effects are bloody weak. There is often a chasm between intent and execution in this kind of cheap video gore job – one even squishy sound design cannof shrink. I giggled more than I gagged, especially at a particularly silly character revelation somewhere around the halfway mark.

The disc sports an excellent transfer, a small stills gallery and a raft of trailers for other goodies from Unearthed Films. Don't look for it in Canada, though, as it's been banned for sexual violence; a noble and meaningless gesture.

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"This disc... simply kicks ass."
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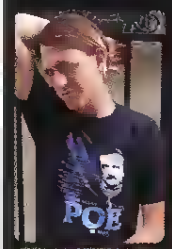
"It's a must-have for fans of this brand of supernatural story-telling." - DVD Verdict

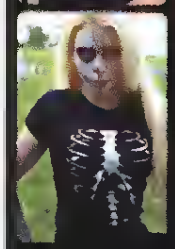


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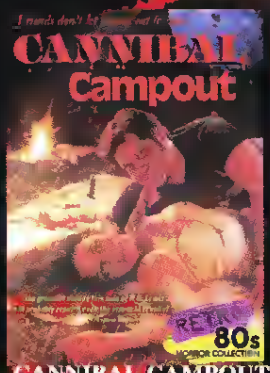
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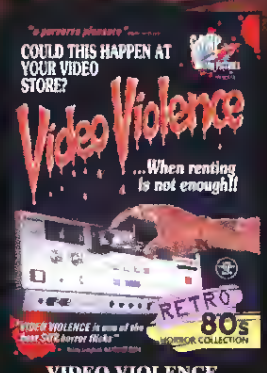
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DEADLY DANGEROUS DECENT DULL DRIVEL DOA-DEAD ON ARRIVAL

AUDIO DROME

REVIEWS BY CHRIS ALEXANDER, BRETT BAKKER, KEITH CARMAN, THE GORE-MET, MARK R. HASAN, LIISA LADOUCEUR, KEN MCINTYRE AND TREVOR TUMINSKI



THE DEAD GIRL Soundtrack
Adam Gorgoni
LAKESHORE
The only worthy thing to emerge from *Candyman: Day of the Dead* was Adam Gorgoni's music, which transcended that film's total lameness with minor success. *The Dead Girl* gives the composer a collection of better characters to craft a cohesive score from, and his use of electronic tonalities, soft piano, woodwinds and strings address the impact that said corpse has on several female characters. Gorgoni has gone for emotional drama over horror here and his music evokes shifting concerns of loneliness, regret, sorrow, shame and a modicum of hope. Gorgoni's main theme is a melancholic New Age blues piece, and the cues sort of shape-shift from ambient concepts to fragmented riffs, with occasional bursts of exotic percussion amid a number of suitable vocal songs. The warm analogue tones are beautifully mixed and creep out like clouds of soothing bass and discreet, unnerving dissonance.
MRH ☠☠☠☠



DEAD SILENCE Soundtrack
Charlie Clouser
LAKESHORE
The main theme for *Dead Silence* oddly recalls John Carpenter's menacing lullabies, and Charlie Clouser bridges those iconic elements with his own penchant for potent melodic surges. It's basically the same grand theme recapitulation that beautifully punctuated the final twist in the original *Saw*, although the emphasis here is on slow builds, suspicious reveals and short stabs of clamorous shock. Some of the chord shifts do bear a discernable resemblance to Carpenter's *Big Trouble in Little China*, but Clouser's overall approach is to glide between low, bellowing effects and shrillness, then contrast those harsh elements with bouts of soft piano. Occasional bits of watery digital processing augment the score, but a lack of edge and decisive narrative drive mainly reduce the album to a familiar collage of horrific but meandering impressions. **MRH** ☠☠1/2



ZOMBI Progressive Rock
Cosmos
RELAPSE
Cosmos finds Pittsburgh's gruesome twosome (Tony Paterra and Steve Moore) once again mining Goblin/Frizzi-esque analogue electronics and big beat Neil Peart-style percussion and shaping them into a '70s death jazz cinema stew that would make Claudio Simonetti proud. That said, one wishes the band would try to be true to their prog rock roots and actually progress a bit more – there's virtually nothing on *Cosmos* that strays from their established formula or surprises fans on any level. However, it's still absolutely astonishing that only two people are creating a sound this punishing, and anyone who's had the pleasure of seeing them live can attest to that.
CA ☠☠☠



THE RIPMEN Psychobilly
Graveyard in our Memories
WOLVERINE
In what is surely one of the oddest psychobilly releases of this year, The Ripmen wear their influences on their tattooed sleeves. *Graveyard in our Memories* is mainly covers of older psycho bands such as Mad Sin, Nekromantix and Batmobile, with each of the seven tracks covered featuring one member of said band performing alongside The Ripmen. The covers are executed well and the guest appearances add diversity to The Ripmen's straight-ahead sound. The four bonus tracks, however, should be stuffed back into whatever creepy closet they came from (do we really need another version of Soft Cell's "Tainted Love" or a psycho rendition of Garbage's "Only Happy When It Rains"?). This is a great album if you're interested in hearing some new takes on old songs, but other than that, it's a np, maaan.
BB ☠☠1/2

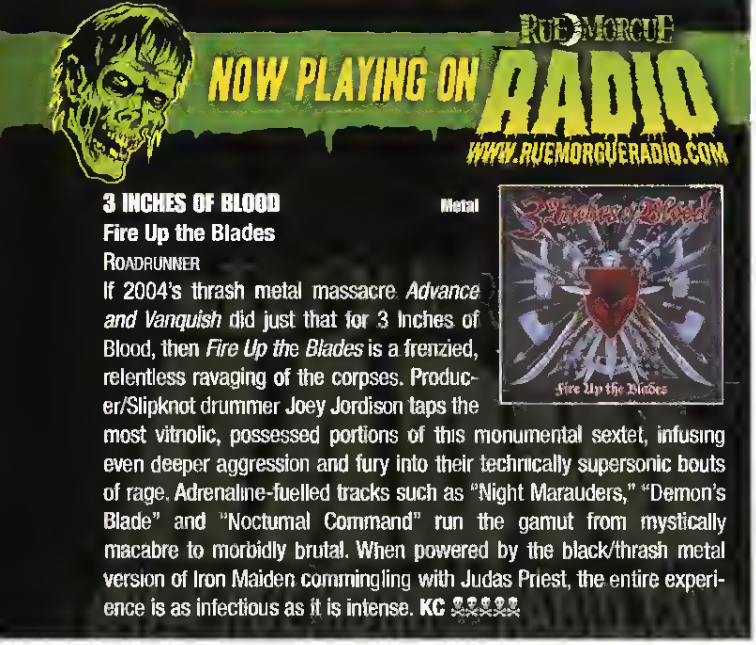


SERPENTEENS Rock
The Superhuman Monstershow
BLOOD AND GUTS
NYC ghoul-rockers The Serpenteens spring from their tombs with a blast of genre-mincing boogie that plays out like a teenaged KISS trapped inside an old issue of *Tales from the Crypt*. Tunes like the finger-popping splatterbilly title track, the punchy "Make Sure I'm Dead" and the surprisingly sugar-frosted "Cemetery Man" find the band aiming for a Hallow-Queen sort of elegance, but the


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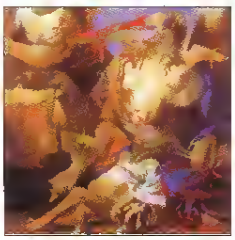
MARILYN MANSON Rock
Eat Me, Drink Me
INTERSCOPE
Emo bands, you've been served. On "If I Was Your Vampire," the opening track of *Eat Me, Drink Me*, when Manson sings "you pressed your knife up against your heart" he's not making shit up just to impress the spooky girls. OK, maybe one – his new babe, Rachel Wood, really did offer to stab herself for the AntiChrist Superstar. And so this album is about the psychotic effects of the drug of love, the break-up of his marriage to pin-up darling Dita Von Teese and – despite the title – very little about *Alice in Wonderland*. Songs about death wishes and vindictive bitches are less epic than usual, but still work on a gut level. The style is less goth, more glam (including ridiculous guitar solos – ugh!), with more radio-friendly gloss than just the single "Heart Shaped Glasses." Sorry about your heartbreak, MM, but, hey, it got you to lighten up!
LL ☠☠☠☠☠





3 INCHES OF BLOOD **Metal**
Fire Up the Blades
ROADRUNNER
If 2004's thrash metal massacre *Advance and Vanquish* did just that for 3 Inches of Blood, then *Fire Up the Blades* is a frenzied, relentless ravaging of the corpses. Producer/Slipknot drummer Joey Jordison taps the most vitriolic, possessed portions of this monumental sextet, infusing even deeper aggression and fury into their technically supersonic bouts of rage. Adrenaline-fuelled tracks such as "Night Marauders," "Demon's Blade" and "Nocturnal Command" run the gamut from mystically macabre to morbidly brutal. When powered by the black/thrash metal version of Iron Maiden commingling with Judas Priest, the entire experience is as infectious as it is intense. **KC** ☠☠☠☠☠

raspy "whoa-ohs" and the grubby gutter-glam guitars unveil the sleazy garage band underneath. *The Superhuman Monstershow* culminates in a heap of sweat and gristle, with four crowd-rousing live tracks that showcase the band's lust for all things Danzig, most notably during the squealling lycanthrope rock of "Silver Bullet" and the sinister doo-wopping "Please be my Zombie Bride." Campy stuff for sure, but the monster kids will freak over this catchy collection of slither 'n' roll. **KM** ☠☠☠



KILLING JOKE **Metal**
Hosannas from the Basements of Hell
COOKING VINYL
Since forming in 1979, England's Killing Joke have slowly evolved with every album, mutating from a post-punk, new wave synth band into a guttural, apocalyptic beast that has inspired the likes of Ministry, Nine Inch Nails and Metallica. A return to the archaic tape technology of their early years, *Hosannas from the Basements of Hell* finds singer Jaz Coleman bellowing madly like a shaman from the nethers about arcane fire-lit rituals and political revolution amongst hypnotic keyboards, anchoring guitars and pummelling, percussive riffs. A known occultist, Coleman embarks on a lyrical witch hunt, "eating your liver and heart like voodoo" on the title track and killing his way to the truth as one of the "few (who've) tasted blood" on "Walking with Gods." While not as clean and focused as 2003's self-titled effort, *Hosannas* is the smoldering, brutally heavy calling card of a band that refuses to age gracefully. **TT** ☠☠☠☠



BLOOD FREAK **Metal**
Multiplex Massacre
RAZORBACK
Frightmare guitarist/vocalist Maniac Neil is the busiest artist on the Razorback roster. *Multiplex Massacre* is his third solo release under the banner of Blood Freak, melding '80s thrash riffs with high-velocity grindcore tempos and Razorback-standard, Carcass-inspired grunt/shriek vocals. The thirteen paeans to all forms of B-movie madness ("Rocktober Blood," "Savage Streets" and "Night Beast" among them) are saved from being a faceless blur by excellent dual guitar leads, doom metal breaks and intriguing instrumental bookends. The death-to-scenesters sentiment of "Don't Metal with Satan" is the only weak moment in what is otherwise a lean and mean display of technical proficiency. This is a complete package – you'll lose hours of your day just looking at the wicked artwork. **GM** ☠☠☠☠



GLENN DANZIG **Metal**
Black Aria
EVILIVE/SONY MUSIC
The dark lord Danzig has finally released his death-grip on the long out-of-print *Black Aria*, his first instrumental opus from 1993. There's nothing particularly new about this limited-edition reissue, though, apart from the embossed packaging and a cleaner, remastered mix. Danzig's post-Misfits catalogue has always been gloriously overwrought, and with song titles like "Battle for Heaven" and "And the Angels Weep" – this outing is no exception. The Dark Elvis takes off his fingerless gloves to concoct a devilish, mostly keyboard-driven brew of ominous string arrangements and foreboding timpani, cut with haunted angel choirs and shimmering cymbal swells, duly summoning sweet sacrilege with every mournful measure. The monster magnate must've been feeling uncharacteristically sentimental after releasing *Black Aria 2* last year to bestow this demonic offering upon us, but you'd think he could've found it in his black heart to sweeten the reissue a little more for his blessed legions. **TT** ☠☠☠









TIGER ARMY RETURNS WITH A RECORD THAT TAKES THE GENRE IN NEW DIRECTIONS BY DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM SOME UNUSUAL PLACES.

BEYOND PSYCHOBILLY

BY BRETT BAKKER

The title of Tiger Army's latest release couldn't be more appropriate. Called *Music from Regions Beyond*, their fourth full-length album sees the psychobilly band exploring the boundaries of what the genre can be, both musically and thematically. Eleven years in, the band has done what most psychobilly groups have been unable to do: evolve.

Guitarist/songwriter Nick 13 has kept the band's sound and vision alive through endless pitfalls and lineup changes that threatened to put it underground. He is now accompanied by members Jeff Roffredo (stand-up bass) and James Meza (drums) on a disc that mixes sounds as diverse as metal and '80s dark wave.

"Dark wave, '80s dark pop from the UK, is something that I've listened to alongside punk and psychobilly for a long time," acknowledges Nick, whose previous records blended everything from steel guitar to vintage punk to British synthpop. "I think we sort of started touching on those influences on the last record, *Ghost Tigers Rise*, but definitely with [the *Music from Regions Beyond* song] 'The Cold Rain Falls', in particular, we took that influence farther. That was the first song I ever wrote on a guitar with an alternate tuning. The riff made me think of Peter Hook, the electric bass player from Joy Division and New Order, and that's what suggested the kind of hi-hat drum style."

Working with producer Jerry Finn (AFI, Rancid) for the first time, the band turned out a more brooding and introspective disc than any Tiger Army release to date. Of course, the horror elements are there too, as they have been from the start – Nick 13's love of it has never been a secret. Past albums have included tracks about lycanthropy ("Werecat"), the afterworld ("Sea of Fire") and the supernatural ("Incorporeal"). The new record continues that tradition with "Afterworld," about lovers reuniting in the afterlife, "Ghost of Memory," which recounts a haunting experience and "Where the Moss Slowly Grows" (about a childhood friend who recently committed suicide), which evokes a kind of Lovecraftian universe.

"Horror imagery has always been a part of it," Nick explains. "As far as how we incorporate it, that kind of tends to reflect my own biases in horror. I favour an approach that is a little more stylish and psychological; with literature that's the approach of a Lovecraft or a Poe. If it's a film, that's the approach of a Lugosi versus that of a *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. … The horror that I like in film is the stuff that tends to have more to do with the supernatural and what's beyond this world, stuff that's eerie and more subtle."



Anyone who's seen the band live will note a subtlety in their stage show, as well. While most horror-themed punk and psychobilly acts are known for their over-the-top Grand Guignol theatrics, Tiger Army opts instead to focus more on diversifying their sound. ("Novelty aspects of certain psychobilly bands' stage shows are a turn-off to me," notes Nick.) Although this move has alienated some of the more hardcore psychobilly fans, it has made them accessible to a broader audience. Since being signed to Hellcat Records (Tim Armstrong from Rancid's Epitaph imprint) they have gained wider recognition than perhaps any other psycho band to date. Music magazine Alternative Press called *Music from the Regions Beyond* "One of the most anticipated albums of 2007."

Given his love of creepy, atmospheric horror, it's no surprise then that Nick 13 is a huge David Lynch fan. And when he found himself hanging out on the set of Lynch's latest movie, *Inland Empire*, he jumped at the offer to appear in the film.

"It's more of a cameo because I don't speak," he points out, "but the experience of being on the set and watching [Lynch] work, receiving personal direction from him, was just a really special thing because he's one of my favourite directors of all time. I was on the set and Dave's assistant Jeremy called me over and was like, 'Hey, would you like to be in a scene?' That was a pretty surreal moment."

Of course, it begs the question: will Tiger Army go another step beyond and join groups such as Marilyn Manson, Nine Inch Nails and Rammstein by contributing to a David Lynch soundtrack?

Nick laughs and admits, "I don't believe he has heard the band."

PLAY DEAD

GRAPHICS PLAYABILITY SHIVERS

HIGHEST RATING IS THREE.

GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE



ZOMBIETOWN

Board Game

Twilight Creations Inc.

ZombieTown is the newest game from the creators of *Zombies!!!*, and this time it's a siege. Search for weapons and build barricades, while battling hordes of gut-munching zombies intent on liberating you from your brains. The wonderfully crafted, fold-out gaming board elaborately details the neighbouring houses and cemetery while the playing cards, though small, depict nicely illustrated scenes of the zombie apocalypse. Also included are 100 plastic zombie figures that are interchangeable with figures from any of the other *Zombies!!!* games.

Each game is set over a fictional ten-day period with players moving their own characters as well as the zombies. Take turns utilizing action cards to determine your next move, be it arming yourself, setting off fireworks to stall a zombie advance, erecting a barricade or attacking a zombie – or a fellow player.

The rulebook is pretty straightforward but doesn't cover a lot of situations that arise, so print off the FAQs from twilightcreationsinc.com, as you'll definitely have to refer to them more than once during a game.

After ten days (a.k.a. turns) have passed, surviving players count up the number of houses, weapons and survivors they have accumulated, as well as the number of zombies they have (re)killed and a winner is declared. Sessions usually last about an hour and are as fun to watch as they are to play. Alliances are built and destroyed as ammo grows scarce and the zombies just keep on coming. There goes the neighbourhood.







GRAPHICS
PLAYABILITY
SHIVERS

PENUMBRA: OVERTURE

PC

Got Game Entertainment/Frictional Games

Crank the brightness on your monitor, monster fans. Set in the tunnels of an abandoned mine, *Penumbra: Overture* is the first part of a horror game trilogy that submerges players in a dark world of madness and terror. In it, players assume the role of Philip, a young man travelling to Northern Greenland to solve the mystery of his father's disappearance. Once there, he finds himself battling giant worms, humongous spiders and zombie dogs – while clinging to his sanity.

Featuring an interactive environment controlled by mouse rather than keyboard, *Penumbra* is a gorgeously rendered puzzle-driven game that'll have you desperately trying to overcome obstacles while hiding from the creatures lurking in the shadows. Replete with an eerie soundtrack and superb voice acting, it offers a constant feeling of dread as you creep down dark corridors hearing nothing but your own echoing footsteps and the shriek of a disfigured beastie. You'll need a night light after this one.



GRAPHICS 1/2
PLAYABILITY 1/2
SHIVERS 1/2

MONSTER MADNESS: BATTLE FOR SUBURBIA

PC, Xbox 360

Sound Clash Interactive

The jock, the goth girl, the nerd and the cheerleader. No, it's not a *Breakfast Club* reunion, it's a new kick-ass video game that'll have you battling over 70 different types of monsters while travelling across five different environments, including a shopping mall, high school and spooky cemetery.

Players gather parts to build bigger and better weapons and equip hot-wired vehicles, all while facing evil aliens, shambling skeletons and one particularly grumpy granny whose main weapon is her ability to fire a tornado of cats at you. Definitely geared towards a younger audience, the comic book graphics give the game a campy, B-movie feel similar to games like *Destroy All Humans*.

The four player co-operative mode hearkens back to arcade games like *Gauntlet* and *Smash TV*, while the online multi-player games can service up to sixteen players at a time. Dibs on the goth gir

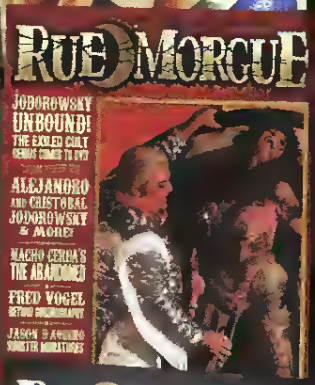

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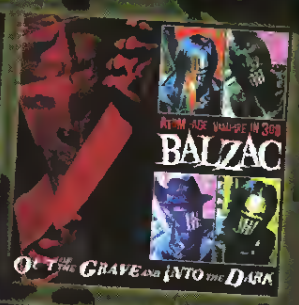
















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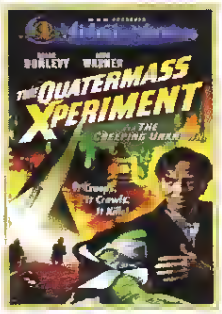
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THE QUATERMASS XPERIMENT



Directed by Val Guest

UK – 1955

Before Hammer Films became one of the most influential film factories in the genre with its sexy *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* adaptations, the studio produced low-budget thrillers alongside cinematic adaptations of existing British television and radio programs. Without a substantial success to Hammer's name, executives James Carreras and Anthony Hinds purchased the film rights for a play written by Nigel Kneale (*Professor Quatermass*). This culminated in the groundbreaking 1953 BBC teleseries *The Quatermass Experiment* (directed by Rudolph Cartier) for the studio's next project.

In the series, Professor Bernard Quatermass' experimental manned rocket returns with only one crew member on board. As he tries to unravel the mystery of the two missing astronauts, it becomes apparent that the survivor, Carroon (Richard Wordsworth), is infected with an alien organism. Escaping from the hospital, he steadily mutates into a monster, killing anyone who crosses his path. When the show aired, it caused a furor through its infusion of horrific imagery within a science fiction narrative, with viewers responding in a BBC Audience Research Report that it was "tasteless," "unpleasant" and "harrowing" viewing.

In an attempt to replicate this response and thereby ensure the film's commercial success, Carreras requested that director Val Guest heighten the horrific elements of Kneale's story. Although the process of condensing a three-hour serial into a 90-minute film meant that certain scenes had to be reduced or cut entirely, it also meant that the emphasis could be shifted onto Carroon's mutation. His transformation is graphic, with his arm mutating into a bloated, pulsating appendage. The camera lingers upon the infection as it does upon the deformed corpses of those Carroon has killed to feed the transformation. Guest balances this horror with the tragedy of Carroon's absorption, making him into a creature similar to Frankenstein's creation – mute, deformed but painfully human. His final transformation is again shown realistically and given considerable screen time as it attaches itself to the vaulted ceiling of Westminster Cathedral.

Other changes were made, most notably to Quatermass himself (Brian Donlevy). Instead of being the serial's reflective intellectual, in the film he is presented as a rational but brutal man of science, headstrong and determined. The ending was also changed into a more cinematic spectacle with Quatermass electrocuting the mutated Carroon – all of which was also shown in graphic detail.

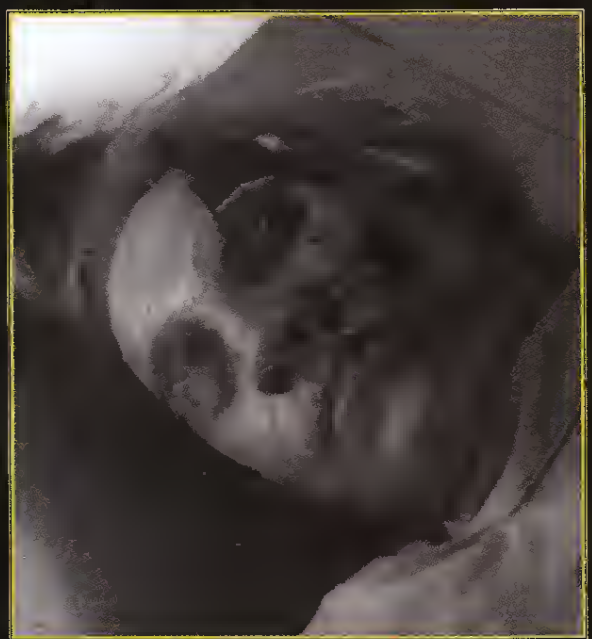
Carreras' plan was to gain the dreaded X Certificate (Adults Only) from the BBFC and then exploit it through the misspelling of the film's title. The strategy worked and as a consequence *The Quatermass Xperiment* was one of the first British films to receive the X Certificate. Upon its initial release in 1955, the film generated large audience figures in Britain and then repeated this success in the United States, making *Xperiment* Hammer's first international hit. While the sequel went into production, Hammer attempted to replicate the film's success with *X the Unknown* (1956). Again trading on the novelty value of the X Certificate, *Unknown* is similar to *Xperiment*, featuring a Quatermass-esque scientist tackling a radioactive creature buried deep beneath the Scottish moors.

Ironically, by ripping itself off, Hammer produced one of the first of *Xperiment*'s many pretenders. The combination of horror and sci-fi soon became an established subgenre and the idea of a mutating astronaut was "borrowed" in films such as *The Hideous Sun Demon* (1959), *First Man into Space* (1959), *The Incredible Melting Man* (1977), *Alien* (1979), *The Fly* (1958, and the remake in 1986), *Event Horizon* (1997) and *The Astronaut's Wife* (1999). The film and teleseries also had an effect on television, with a number of episodes of the BBC's *Doctor Who* expanding upon the basic premise of *Quatermass*. Similarly, Chris Carter's *The X-Files* shares *Quatermass*' themes of alien invasion, parasitic life forms infecting humans and governmental agencies whose experiments go awry.

Because Guest chose to shoot the film in black and white and, wherever possible, with a hand-held camera, he created a documentary feel that emphasized both the realism of the narrative and its Gothic pretensions. This approach became the foundation of the Hammer Horror "look" and is also somewhat synonymous with the British horror film. (See: *Hellraiser*, *28 Days Later* and *The Descent*.)

Most significantly, *The Quatermass Xperiment* also single-handedly changed the course of Hammer Films, opening the studio up to the potential of horror cinema and allowing for the classic "Hammer Horrors" to be made, which led to a British horror boom. For this contribution alone, *Quatermass* can be considered to be a very successful experiment indeed.

James Rose



The Quatermass Xperiment: *Setting the sci-fi horror template.*

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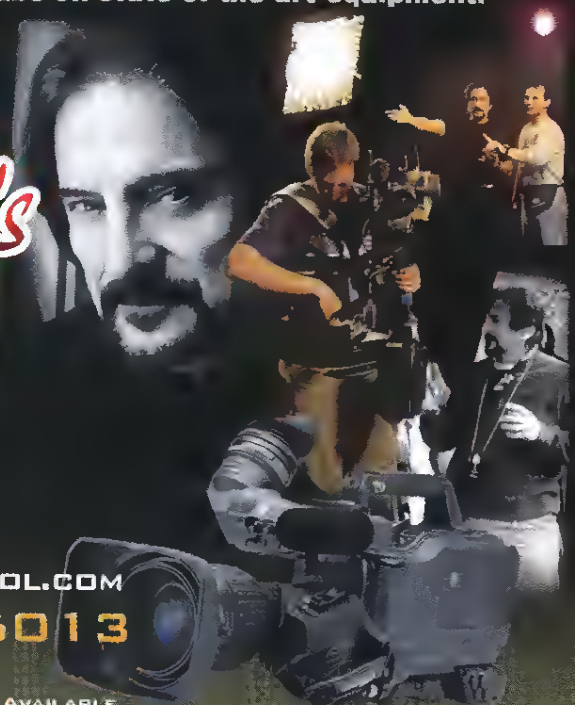
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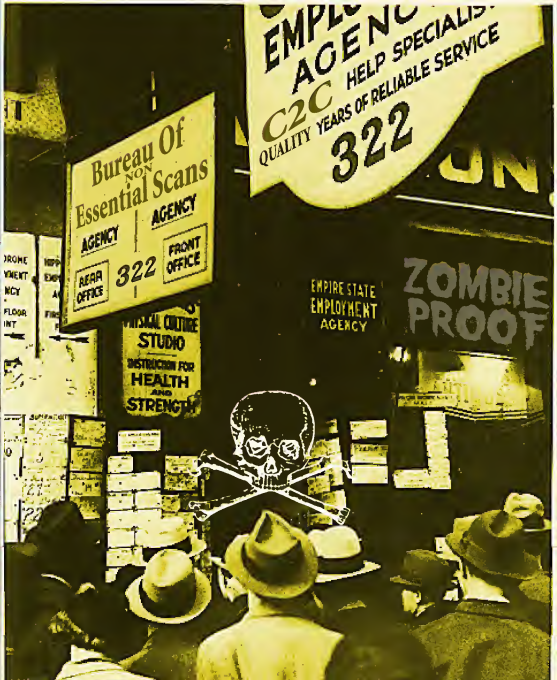
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